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BRAG AIMED A BLOW AT THE COWBOY. BUT THE LATTER CAUGHT HIS ARM AND HELD IT
WITH A TENACIOUS GRIP.

Dandy Duke, the Cowboy;

OR,

BOB'S LIGHTNING HORSE.

BY MAJOR E. L. ST. VRAIN,
AUTHOR OF "RUBE, THE TENDERFOOT," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF A DANGEROUS JOURNEY.

"I WANT to hire a man to drive me to Tombstone."

"Reckon you can't get him nigh here."

"And why not, sir; why not?"

"Because ther Apaches are on ther war-path; ther Ginger Trail fa'rly bristles with them; ha'r is bein' raised freely and ther very dickens is ther pay in gin'ral. With ther durned reds slaughterin' every white they kin smell out, none ov us is anxious ter stand up as a terrible example. No, sir!"

"What's the villainous Apaches to me, sir? I don't care a cent if every grain of sand in Arizona has been turned into an Apache. I'm going through to Tombstone, sir, if ninety-nine men out of every hundred are killed, sir. I'll hire the hundreth. Yes, sir!"

"What if he won't be hired?"

"What if—Thunderation, sir, I'll hire him if I rob the United States treasury to do it. I'll go through to Tombstone if I leave a driver dead at every turn of the wheels. Yes, sir!"

This conversation took place in front of the Western Hemisphere Hotel, Digger's Delight, Arizona, and was carried on between the man who wished to go to Tombstone, a stranger to all there, and one of the residents of the town.

Digger's Delight was not a large place, but it was active and bustling, possessing a population of solid, brave men who were supposed to risk their lives as coolly as an Eastern man would the chances at a game of pool.

When Major Artemas Bragg came to Digger's Delight he did not doubt his ability to get a man to drive him through to Tombstone, but we have seen what luck awaited him.

Major Bragg was upset by his ill-luck. He was very anxious to go through, but hope seemed to vanish.

"I'll give five hundred dollars to the man who'll take me across the plain," he said.

The offer seemed a very generous one, but dead silence reigned among the men of Digger's Delight. No one raised his voice to accept.

"Perhaps you think I'll double the sum," howled Major Bragg, "but I won't do it to save this one-horse town from instant destruction. I'd see it overrun by locusts and other Bible plagues, first. Yes, sir!"

Then the man proceeded to remark that the hero of Vicksburg misunderstood them. They were not influenced by mercenary motives; in fact, the major hadn't money enough to influence them; but as for going out on the Ginger Trail at that particular time, to be scalped by Apaches, they would see Artemas Bragg planted heels up before they would stir.

Bragg had stormed until he could storm no more, and his ruddy face was looking the picture of despair, when a light and musical whistle broke in on the momentary silence, and a newcomer appeared on the scene.

He was a youth of about nineteen years, but so toughened by the wild life of the West that he had the form and energy of a man. He was not handsome, for his features were rather coarse and covered with tan and freckles at that; but it was a face full of honesty, frankness, good-humor and resolution, and though he might be a border boy, no "tough" would think of asking his co-operation in an unmanly work.

This young man was no stranger in Digger's Delight, and he was at once banteringly greeted.

"Hello, Brimstone Bob, here's a job for you!"

The speaker's finger was leveled at Major Bragg, and the eyes of the youth turned the same way. Bragg saw how bold and frank they were and took a fresh start.

"Young man, I'll give you five hundred dollars to take me to Tombstone."

"Can't be done," Bob tersely answered. "The 'Paches would have your scalp in fifteen minutes."

"I'm going if I travel in a balloon!" shouted the officer. "I'll go to Tombstone if ten thousand earthquakes stood loafing around in my way."

Brimstone Bob's face grew more serious.

"Is the case really so serious?" he asked.

"Serious? Are death and robbery and arson serious? I think they *are*, slightly. My brother, Abe, has died, and left a mine and a daughter, but what does his rascally nephew—not *my* nephew, you understand—do, but swear Karah was *not* his daughter, and not the heiress, and that he, Miles Bland, is the next of kin and heir to the mine and other property. I say, is that serious?"

The major paused, panting for breath, and Brimstone Bob took up the conversation.

"And *this* is why you want to go to Tombstone?"

"Isn't it enough—"

"Quite enough," the youth interrupted, in cool, business-like tones. "You say you want to go to Tombstone. The best way is by saddle. Get a horse and I'll pilot you across the plain, 'Paches or no 'Paches."

"I can't sit in a saddle. I've got a wooden leg and I'm used-up generally. I must go by stage. Can't you drive one?"

"Yes."

"I'll give you five hundred dollare to take me through."

"It'll cost you more than that. No man will loan a carriage for such a trip, for they don't hanker to furnish fire-wood for the 'Paches. You must buy Sam Seavey's stage."

"I'll do it, of course, and the necessary horses."

"No; I'll furnish the horses. I've got four as fine ones as ever rapped a hoof in Arizona, and we're going to need them all. There's sand in our route where two horses would find it hard pulling, but the four will send us a-flying. Get

ready, and I'll be around. My name is Robert Grover, sometimes called Brimstone Bob."

It was five hours later when the adventurous pair left Digger's Delight. They went well armed and provisioned, and with the four spirited, coal-black horses on the stage, seemed capable of doing almost anything desired.

Yet, the men of the town bade farewell to Brimstone Bob in a most melancholy way. Not one there expected to ever again see him alive. His curling, brown hair seemed destined for use at a grim Apache's belt.

The old inhabitant declared that it was impossible to go through alive; he had never seen a worse time along the Ginger Trail.

Yet, the outfit went out of town with a good deal of style and flourish, Brimstone Bob sitting on the box and Major Bragg beside him.

The latter was delighted with his turnout. The wagon was Sam Seavey's stage, and, having been but two weeks in use, was in the best possible condition. The horses were magnificent fellows—four strong, fleet animals, coal-black but smooth-coated and shining, young, fleet-footed and high-spirited.

Major Bragg was at once captivated.

"If that team won't do the work no team can," he declared. "They are beauties, sir, beauties!"

The youth's eyes glistened.

"Right, major, right; they can't be beaten in Arizona. I've owned them for a year and wouldn't part from them, anyway. I call them my Lightning Horse Quartette, and when we take the road the spokes just hum."

All Bragg's admiration was not given to the horses; he saw and duly appreciated the ease and skill with which Brimstone Bob handled the reins, and it became evident to him that he had secured a good outfit.

If he failed to reach Tombstone, it would be because the Apaches were truly the lords of the plain.

The young driver settled down to a steady pace and the horses held it to perfection. There was no urging, no holding in, no fancy work or worrying of the horses, but at that even pace which tells in the long run, they bowled along toward Tombstone.

Major Bragg's spirits arose, and he spoke confidently of reaching their destination and punishing Miles Bland, the "young villain" who had wronged a helpless girl out of her fortune.

Brimstone Bob said nothing, for he was less sanguine. He hoped to see Tombstone again, but he was better informed as to the real danger than the ex-soldier.

Even as straws show which way the wind blows, so the travelers had a disagreeable encounter five miles out of Digger's Delight.

Two horsemen were observed riding toward them at full speed, and Bragg got out his Remington rifle, but as they came nearer they were seen to be white men, and unarmed, hatless, coatless, and badly frightened at that.

They had a woeful story to tell. They were all that remained of a dozen cowboys who had been at a ranch on a branch of the Gila; the Apaches had scooped in the others, and

their scapps were dangling from the red bucks' belts.

Again Major Bragg was warned to go back.

"Go back!" he roared. "Not if Tecumseh and all his braves come to life and bring trees down here from behind which to fight us. No, sir!"

"But—" expostulated the cowboy, only to be interrupted by the irascible veteran.

"There are no 'buts' about it, you cowardly villain!" he thundered: and as he snatched the whip from Bob's hand, the cowboys hurriedly resumed their flight toward Digger's Delight.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST NOTE OF ALARM.

THE stage rolled on toward Tombstone. The first novelty of the trip had worn away, and silence had fallen between the men. Bragg had tired himself storming at the well-meaning cowboys, and now that they were fairly adrift on the wide plain he began to look more carefully at the situation, as a good soldier should.

He studied the face of his driver as though it were a barometer, but Brimstone Bob remained perfectly cool and at his ease. Yet, the major was shrewd enough to suspect that it was because he had a brave nature; he noticed that the young man often and keenly scanned the plain.

He had taken the risk, but he was not indifferent to danger.

The sun was near the meridian when they reached a small stream whose advantages they did not neglect. An hour's halt was made, men and animals ate and drank, and then the journey was resumed.

At the expiration of another hour they found themselves among the sand-hills, some of which were twenty feet high and others mere piles of wayward grains, which had failed to cling to the larger ones.

In observing them Bragg forgot to look for anything else, but he aroused as the young driver suddenly pulled in on the reins.

"What now?" Bragg asked.

Bob pointed with his whip toward the south.

"Horsemen," he calmly observed.

The veteran looked and saw a number of black spots against the sky. They were of such vague and insignificant proportions that he looked a little doubtful.

"Are you sure they are horsemen?" he asked.

"Yes, and Apaches, too."

The major helped himself to a large chew of tobacco.

"What are you going to do about it?" he asked.

"Simply remain where we are. These sand-hills are our best friends. If it were not for them we should be visible to our neighbors, so here we stay, ready to flee at a moment's notice if such a thing becomes necessary."

Nearer came the red lords of the plains, and even to Bragg, who had won glory all the way from Bull Run to Appomattox, they looked warlike to an uncomfortable degree. They were well-developed fellows, and if there was any weakness of limbs common to "horse Indians" it was not visible to the naked eye.

They were armed with weapons furnished by the United States Government in some moment of sentimental "gush," or stolen, as the case might be.

Bragg looked well to his weapons and prepared for warm work. His jaws worked with machine-like regularity on his tobacco and the spirit of his military days was well to the front.

Brimstone Bob was more quiet, but he was alive to the demands of the occasion. He was using his eyes to better effect than Bragg, too, for he had discovered that one of the horsemen was not an Indian; more, that he was a prisoner.

This discovery he communicated to the old soldier, but it was no time for useless words.

The Apaches entered the sand-hills, and Bob saw with grave fears that there seemed little hope of their missing the trail of the stage. If this was seen it would soon become a race for life, and then Bragg would see why his driver had declared four horses necessary.

A new move on the part of the Apaches averted the danger for the time. They halted, dismounted, and camped where the sand-hills threw out shadows which would protect them from the hot sun.

Bragg felt a thrill of hope and believed the time had come for them to "silently steal away," but he was soon undeceived. Red pickets were posted, and a mouse could scarcely have approached or left the sand-hills unseen, but the white men, shielded by the piled-up grains, remained undiscovered.

Brimstone Bob felt a good deal of interest in the Apaches' prisoner, for he knew only too well what the Apaches' plan must be. Since he had been saved from the first slaughter, it showed that a worse fate was in store for him.

He felt a strong desire to aid him, or, at least, to take the first steps toward it by taking a closer survey. He mentioned the fact to Bragg, expecting opposition, but the old veteran was by no means selfish.

"Go," he said, "and I'll stand by the horses. If there is any alarm, run this way and I'll have them all ready for work."

"And so, after a few cautions, Bob glided toward the Indian camp.

They were eating dinner, but as this was a familiar sight for him he gave immediate attention to the prisoner.

The latter was a young man, not much older than Bob, but he had a considerable hirsute growth on his upper lip, and, with his powerful form, looked older than he was. The observer, seeing his dress and general appearance, pronounced him a typical cowboy and miner, and that was all that was in his appearance to attract attention, unless we say he looked like a rough-and-ready, perhaps, reckless young man.

Naturally the watcher's sympathy went out to him. He was of his own color, and no one who had ever lived in Arizona has any friendship for the Apaches.

Bob did not forget Bragg and the stage, but as they could not leave the sand-hills while the Indians remained, he paid no attention to the major and kept his place.

In this way an hour passed. The red-skins' dinner was completed, but they showed no signs

of going. Bob saw this and came to the decision that they would not leave until the sun was down.

He left his post and explained his views to Bragg. The latter, with all his noisiness at times, was far from being foolishly rash, and though he was in haste to go through to Tombstone, he had no desire to push out on the plain until the Indians were out of the way.

Consequently, he agreed with Bob that they had better remain where they were, but he was not so ready to agree to rescue the white prisoner.

CHAPTER III.

THE HORSE QUARTETTE GETS IN MOTION.

THE afternoon wore away without any change in the situation. The Apaches listlessly kept their camp and our two friends were obliged to keep theirs.

Bob had not given up the idea of rescuing the white prisoner, and he saw darkness grow near with pleasure. He had pretty clearly gauged the major and felt sure he would not allow the young man to suffer where he might be saved.

After the sun went down he renewed his argument. He was not disappointed.

"Have your own way," said the veteran, "but you're getting us into a confounded fix, sir; a most villainous fix. We can't absorb that young heathen like so much dew, nor turn our vehicle into a balloon. Result, we'll soon have the whole pack howling at our heels. Yes, sir!"

"My quartette can outrun them."

"I s'pose they can outrun greased lightning," was the irascible reply. "Never mind, however, never mind; we're not going to turn pirates here in the desert and leave men to roast and be served on the half-shell. No, sir!"

And so it was settled, and as darkness gathered Bob prepared for immediate work. The Apaches were liable to move at any time—indeed, Bob was surprised at their prolonged halt—and then they might as well try to capture a shooting-star.

The young man explained his plans to the major and then glided noiselessly away.

Bob reached the edge of the Apache camp and there paused to survey it. The scene had not changed; the grim warriors were as before and the prisoner lay with his back to a mound, outwardly wholly at his ease.

It was a part of Bob's plan to tunnel through this mound; indeed, that was the only way open to him. To attempt to move around it would be very dangerous, to say the least.

He went at his work in earnest, using one of the stage-seats, which he had secured for a spade. There was no resistance; the soft sand was easily moved and he went ahead like a burrowing animal.

He was half-way through, and wholly inside his tunnel, when there was a sound of voices just behind him. He recognized the guttural, harsh tones, and, looking back, could see a pair of Apache legs.

It was a moment of thrilling suspense, for discovery seemed certain, but danger was temporarily averted by an unexpected occurrence.

There was a motion of the sand behind the young adventurer, and then it fell down into his tunnel, shutting out his view of Apache legs and starlight at one and the same time. He was, of course, buried by the slide, but it did not trouble him in the least. He had plenty of elbow room in his vicinity, and, resuming work, soon had fresh air from the other side.

This opening gave him a plain view of the prisoner. Indeed, Bob nearly thrust the board into his back by accident, a way of announcing his presence which was scarcely cautious enough.

He tried another way.

"I say, stranger!"

He spoke in a subdued voice, but the young man could not help hearing him. He started slightly, but, showing good nerves, turned his head slowly.

"Say nothing," continued Brimstone Bob. "I am a friend and a white man, like yourself. I'll cut your bonds, and then do you follow me. Of course you know your life depends on your own prudence."

The stranger nodded and put his hands nearer the breach. One sweep of Bob's knife liberated them, and those on his ankles followed. He was free, but not yet "out of the woods."

With admirable skill he turned and wormed his way after Bob inside the mound. The vacant space was barely large enough to hold them both, and the leader lost no time in turning to the work of removing the sand which had caved in on him.

"You're a brick," said the rescued man, "and I'll do you a good turn some day. We need hosses; jest watch me gobble up a couple."

"No; I have other means of going. But, don't talk now. My scalp is not for sale or to let."

As he spoke his impromptu spade went through the sand, a little light entered, and then a fresh lot of the fine grains came tumbling down, leaving a considerable hole, and Brimstone Bob, looking through, found himself gazing into the glittering eyes of an Apache warrior.

With one long, agile bound he shot into the open air, and in another moment the Apache was lying flat on his back. Bob's head had struck him in the pit of his stomach and knocked sense and life out of his body for the time.

The stricken man fell to the ground, but by the time he was fairly down the white youths were in retreat, led by Bob, and the other redskins came swarming from among the sand-mounds like prairie-dogs making for their burrows.

Instantly, a chorus of angry yells arose. They saw the prostrate warrior and the fleeing whites, and the scene needed no interpretation.

The distance to the stage was soon traveled, and they found everything ready for departure. Major Bragg was in position on the box, the reins upheld in his expectant hands, and even the horses seemed to know the critical state of affairs.

Brimstone Bob gained the seat with a flying leap, and the rescued captive, seeing no other chance, bounded inside. Then Bob caught the reins, a single word was given the Horse Quar-

tette, they straightened the straps and were off like a shot.

The ex-captive began shouting defiance; but his tune suddenly changed. The regular and vicious cracking of a repeating rifle showed that he had found the weapons inside the stage, and was practicing on the pursuers.

The major sniffed disapprovingly, and muttered something about firing without orders, but it was no time for quarrels among themselves.

The race was beginning to assume an ominous look.

Fleet and gallant the Horse Quartette certainly was; but it remained a fact that a coach-and-four could not be navigated among the sand-hills as fleetly as a single horse.

All this became clear when the pursued saw that they were being slowly but surely run down.

"What are we going to do?" Bragg demanded.

"What more can we do than this?"

Brimstone Bob did not once look behind him; all his attention was given to his team, and to the route, and he handled his horses like a veteran.

The gallant blacks, on their own part, had never been in better spirits and they went well.

Once free from the sand-hills, Bob gave them the word to do their best, and the wheels hummed like machinery as they whirled around. Footing had improved, and, no longer annoyed by the sand, they were going at race-horse speed.

The ex-captive clambered over the seats to his companions.

"It's a bit," he said in high glee. "Those durned varmints are gwine ter git left. Keep a tight rein on them horses, young feller, an we're all right."

"If you don't like our style, get off and walk," said the major crustily. "I guess you and I can't teach this young man how to drive a coach. Not much?"

"I kin sling ther ribbons ekul ter any man in Arizona," was the boastful reply.

"Go and do it, then, but leave us alone. We've got you out of trouble, and now if you'll sit down and sing low, we'll try to save ourselves."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAJOR TURNS ACROBAT.

It was clear that Bragg and the rescued man were not going to be bosom friends, but the latter did not seem to desire trouble. He stood behind the men on the box and watched the scene with a degree of attention broken only by the zipping of Apache bullets.

Brimstone Bob, who was looking at everything in a thoroughly practical light, saw that the chances were in favor of their holding their own, if no mishap occurred, but a long race must ensue if the Apaches hung to the trail.

Bragg saw the wisdom which had made his driver take four horses and applauded the flying Quartette freely.

The extra passenger grew communicative. He said he was known as Dandy Duke, and that he was a cowboy from Texas, but a miner in

Arizona. He showed a disposition to boast of what he could do, but as he really seemed to be without fear it was in a degree pardonable.

He had been captured while crossing the plain and held as we have seen.

The race continued, three miles were quickly made and the pursuers began to look less ominous.

Several dark objects suddenly loomed up in front of them, and Bob was just on the point of reining out to avoid what he took to be bowlders when he discovered that each and every dark spot was made by a mounted Apache warrior.

They had fallen upon a second party!

Bob's resolution was taken in a moment; it would not do to sheer off and run a neck-and-neck race with those red cut-throats; so he kept the Lightning Quartett headed as they were and cracked his whip over their heads.

"Let her howl!" roared Major Bragg, wild with excitement. "Boot and saddle—double-quick!"

There was a sudden pause on the part of the Indians as they saw the on-coming team, but it was just what Bob had calculated on; that moment's delay gave him his only chance for escape.

"Fire into them!" he ordered, holding his reins fast. "Give them lead to kill."

Major Bragg caught at the idea and at his revolvers at one and the same moment, and as the team, biting and kicking, sprung into the midst of the red-skins, he stood erect and began firing right and left.

Bragg saw one doughty warrior plucked from his saddle by a pair of strong jaws, and he thought the occasion worthy of "three times three."

"Hip, hip, hip, hur-r-r-r—"

His cheer died away in mid-air as the stage-wheel struck against a rearing Apache pony, for the shock was sufficient to raise the incautious major from the box and send him like a cannon-ball through the air.

In the language of the West, he "swapped ends" once or twice in his aerial flight, and when he alighted it was on top an Apache centaur. He struck the latter like a bowling-ball on a rampage, and out of the saddle went the red buck.

Bragg came down astride the brute, all right except that he was facing to the rear.

Almost at the same moment the frightened pony gave a scream of alarm, and, dropping his ears on his neck, shot away like an arrow over the plain.

Poor Bragg was nearly unhorsed by the mishap, but chance enabled him to catch at the pony's tail, and he clung as tightly as though he was working at a dollar an hour with his beard thrown in.

Bragg's real object in going to Tombstone by stage was that, though a military man, he was no horseman.

Now, he was taking a wild ride under circumstances which filled him with horror, and almost made his hair stand on end.

Brimstone Bob had gone through the group of Apaches like a flash of lightning, and without turning a hair, but when it looked as though

victory was won, he was dumfounded at seeing Bragg receding in such a fashion.

Bob, however, lost little time. Quick as he usually moved, he turned the head of his Quartette for the runaway, and swept away in pursuit, followed by a volley of wild lead from the Apaches.

"Oh! thunder an' tarant'lers!" yelled Dandy Duke "see ther old boyee go! Whar's ther circus-folks what hires star acrobaters!"

It was a timely inquiry, but the major was more interested in knowing where *he* was, and what was to become of himself. The pony was flying, and the faster he went, the tighter Bragg clung to his tail.

"Jump off—jump, old man!"

The words floated to him from Dirk's lips as they swept along, but they only brought forth a snort from the veteran.

"Jump?" he roared, longing to shake his fist at the young man. "Do you take me for Sam Patch, or Hole-in-the-Sky? Shoot this infernal horse, will you?"

His prayer remained unheeded, and the stars looked down on the animated scene; a race in which Major Bragg took the lead, and made time which would have won him the "brush" of any fox in England.

At the rear—his novel mode of riding gave him a good view in that direction—came the stage with the Lightning Quartette at a break-neck pace and Brimstone Bob at the ribbons, while in the stern of all, the Apaches, who had combined forces, swept along in the chase.

"Why don't you shoot this blamed mule?" he bellowed, addressing Bob and Duke. "Fire, you infernal rascals, or I'll have you court-martialed!"

The threat was an empty one, but his roaring served to keep the pony in fresh terror and he fled on like a wolf-pursued wild steed of the prairie, or other romantic figure-head.

"Here's your modern Tom O'Shanter!" howled the major, in an ecstasy of fear. "Come and see him. Compare him with the original and see how he pans out. Oh, you villainous mule!"

"Zip!"

A bullet whizzed dangerously near the rider's ears, causing him to dodge, and again he shouted his anger to Bob and Duke:

"Hold on, you diabolical imps! Who're you shooting at! Crease the horse, not me. I'll have you both arrested when we get to Tombstone. I say, you, Brimstone Bob, can't you get those horses out of a walk? Lick 'em, I say; lick them, or I'll—"

The remainder of the sentence was lost as a bullet grazed his ear, and, unconscious that all these favors came from the Apaches, he again delivered an opinion to his innocent friends.

Minutes passed in this race, and though Brimstone Bob urged his blacks to the utmost, he failed to diminish the distance; the pony imagined he was fleeing for his life, and he went in a lively style.

A change was at hand, however.

Unknown to any of the whites, they were approaching a small river which flowed between banks ten feet above the water-level. It was not hard to cross, the water being less than

four feet deep in some places, but speed was not desirable.

Over the bank went the animal, without pause, striking the water with full force, the shock unseating the major, who, however, managed to retain his hold on the tail.

The mule, discouraged by the steep bank beyond them, turned his head down-stream, and began swimming lustily, while four feet behind he towed the major, who did not forget to hold hard even while he spluttered and blowed to clear his mouth of water.

"If this is the way to Tombstone," he thought, in utter despair, "I wish I had gone by some other route, or else let Karah's fortune go to thunder!"

CHAPTER V.

BRIMSTONE BOB FACES THE CROWD.

THE sudden disappearance of Major Bragg was not lost on Brimstone Bob, who had kept watch for traps along the trail. He distinctly heard the splash when the veteran struck and looked over his shoulder.

Only half a dozen Apaches were in sight.

"We've got to fight," he tersely said.

"Looks thunderingly like it," Duke admitted.

"Swing your horses around and we'll use 'em fur a breastwork."

"No, we won't, not while I handle the ribbons. If you take them for Creedmore targets you make a big mistake. Let me engineer this thing, and do you look out for time and be sure and come in on the up-beat. Here we go!"

Bob saw and marked the river with a keen and critical gaze.

With a sharp but graceful curve he swung the stage around broadside to both river and Apaches, and one glance down the bank gave him a thrill of exultation.

It was not so steep but that it might be descended by the horses.

Bob and Dandy Duke went off the box like twin flashes, and almost before the wheels had ceased to turn, the panting animals were clear of the pole. Then Bob caught the reins, swung the Quartette once more, this time to the right and directly behind the wagon, and in a moment more his cherished blacks were knee-deep in the bed of the river with a four-foot bank as a breastwork.

Their master merely had them pause, then, flinging the reins loose, he caught up his rifle, plunged under the stage, and with the weapon resting on a spoke, began work on the advancing Indians, who were by that time dangerously close.

Duke was not behind. His wild yell arose as bravely as though the odds were not terribly against them, and the two rifles began to act as one.

There was a ripple of surprise as the three men at the lead went down in succession, and the horses went flying wildly where they saw fit.

"Hurrah!" cried Dandy Duke, "we have 'em this time."

"Don't be premature," Bob coolly answered. "Five to one we lose our scalps before morning."

"What! against them sneakin' coyotes! Bah! I'm good fur ten, all alone."

"Don't make any mistake," said his more reasonable companion. "The man who takes an Apache for a chicken, usually finds himself left in the end. They have prudently sheered off for awhile, but what's to hinder them crossing the river, and taking us on all sides?"

"It'll be a costly job to undertake."

As Bob saw that the Indians had really fallen back for the time, he turned his thoughts to Major Bragg. What had become of his adventurous patron he did not know, but it was his business to find out, reluctant as he was to desert the post of defense.

He left Duke on guard and crept away along the river-bank. The cowboy looked after him dubiously.

The young fellow fingered his rifle nervously and watched for a chance to use it, but the Apaches seemed to have vanished in earth or air. Finding that he had no immediate work before him, Duke began to use his mind in another direction, and the result was that he began to cast wistful glances at the horses.

Before he had fairly decided, Bob's signal sounded from the water, closely followed by himself.

He was not alone; at his heels came Major Bragg, puffing and blowing, and his disconnected remarks were plainly audible.

He was wet through, but that is a mere nothing in the dry air of Arizona. Bob had found him on the bank, floundering about like a stranded fish where the frightened mule had left him after making his escape from the water.

Brimstone Bob lost little time, but proceeded to "size" the situation. The inaction of the Apaches was proof enough that they were meditating mischief, and the youth was not long in deciding what it was.

"They are sending men across the river so as to take us in the rear. Then there'll be a grand rush, and they will pile in from all sides at once."

"We'll exterminate the whole villainous pack," the major said, wringing his wet clothes wrathfully.

"If they don't send ponies in advance," Dandy Duke maliciously added.

"We had better all swing out of here," interrupted Bob. "It is clear that the Apaches are trying to get into our rear, and that means sure destruction. Our sole hope lies in another dash down the river-bank."

"Good! Swing your cattle into the traces," said the major, in delight.

Brimstone Bob and Duke secured the animals in place with commendable quickness, then swung the team around and the start was made. The footing was good along the stream, bordered as it was by velvet-like grass, and the wheels gave forth no sound of importance as they whirled away.

Suddenly Duke's face brightened.

"By thunder, I know where we are. Half a mile below is a ford whar we kin cross an' only dip ther wheels to ther hub."

"We'll cross there then," Bob coolly answered.

They went on and Duke soon announced the ford, aided by a peculiar tree which grew on the river-bank. He indulged in a few exultant expressions, but Bob was not so sure of his grip; he had his doubts about that ford being a safe place.

If the Apaches were lurking near them, it was not likely they would leave the ford unwatched.

He resolved to take it at full speed and swung his horses around to strike the water in the most favorable way. The Horse Quartette had never been feeling better, and they neared the water at a spanking pace.

The leaders touched water, the stage passed the trees and, reaching the river, served to increase the flying spray churned by the horses' heels.

At the bank a single horseman appeared, as though he had been drawn to the spot by the firing, but, in some way or other, the blacks went over him, steed and all; and with a jolt and rattle as the stage did the same, Brimstone Bob's outfit rolled away in the darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

DANDY DUKE'S INGRATITUDE.

NONE of the fugitives ventured to express confidence for some time. Two, at least, of them knew the typical Apache warrior too well to expect him to let a marked victim slip through his fingers; but it came to pass that they rolled on two miles in the darkness and no red enemy appeared.

It was then unanimously decided that they had made good their escape, or, at least, won a move in the game. Probably the Apaches had not for a moment expected them to make a break for liberty, and the boldest plan had proved the best.

Major Bragg was so exultant that he shook hands all around, forgetting his dislike for Dandy Duke.

"It was more than life with me," he declared. "I'm bound to get through to Tombstone if I kill every Apache in Arizona. Confound their ugly hides, they don't know what they're trying to do when they delay me. Harkee, young man, do you happen to know a young scoundrel named Miles Bland?"

The last question was addressed to Dandy Duke, who started perceptibly, probably because the question had come so suddenly.

"No," he then answered.

"Just wait till I get my hands on him and I'll make him well known!" declared Bragg, pounding his wooden leg on the foot-board in the old way.

"What d'ye want on him?" Duke slowly asked.

"I want to hang the infernal rascal!" fumed the major; "hang him so high, sir, that Haman will go completely out of history. Yes, sir!"

"That's cantankerous, I should say. What's ther owdacious varmint did?"

"Did!" echoed Bragg, catching at Dandy Duke's arm. "He's committed theft and despoiled the orphan. Ain't that enough?—ain't it too much? I say he's a scoundrel, and when I get

to Tombstone he shall hand over the money, and right the wrong. Karah shall have her own."

Dandy Duke seemed to see more clearly.

"P'raps this 'ere Bland will leave it to ther sixes," he observed.

"No, he won't! We don't leave the case to any packed committee of his choosing. No, sir!"

"Who said anything about a committee?"

"You did."

"No, I didn't."

"Didn't you say Bland might want to leave it to sixes?" roared the veteran.

Dandy Duke burst into a responsive roar, but his was of mirth instead of rage. He seemed to be strangling from some great joke which Bragg could not understand; but just as the latter was about to grasp him by the throat, in just indignation, Duke found speech.

"I didn't mean leave et ter six men, but to yer six shooters, which is called sixes for short. That's ther creed in Arizona, an' byar's as thinks ther winner will be him as is quickest on the trigger."

"Why, I'll kick him out of town!"

"I'd like ter see yer do it!" cried Duke, almost defiantly; and then, with a sudden change of manner, he added: "Ef he's like other Arizona boys, he ain't to be chucked around like a bag o' wool."

"I'll butt his head against a rock!" declared Bragg, with his usual prodigality in the line of threats.

There is no knowing to what a pass this incendiary conversation might have gone, for Brimstone Bob here interfered, metaphorically pouring oil on the troubled waters, and a calm succeeded the storm.

Dandy Duke, however, had little more to say. He remained silent in his place, chewing his tobacco as though it had been so much steak of boarding-house solidity, until Bob asked his advice about camping for a couple of hours.

Duke unhesitatingly declared that a rest ought to be taken, that such a course was safe, as the Apaches were probably miles behind, and that he would watch until day and then make it up by sleeping in the coach when the journey was resumed.

The idea was voted good. The halt was made, the horses grained and watered from the supply in the wagon, and then Bob and the major lay down and were soon asleep.

Dandy Duke remained on guard, and for nearly half an hour he was as silent as the sand under his feet, but he then approached the stage.

Bob and Bragg were breathing regularly. He pronounced their names, but they did not answer. They were asleep.

The manner of the cowboy then became decidedly ominous. He drew his knife, raised himself upon the stage-step and bent inside the vehicle. Bob and the major lay sleeping side by side, but dark as it was Dandy Duke could distinguish them.

Bragg lay nearest him, extended peacefully on his back, his broad bosom rising and falling as he breathed.

Duke raised the knife to strike; then paused, hesitated, and clambered down from the wheel.

He went straight to the horses, selected one, and led him apart.

Then he drew his knife, and looked at the other three.

"One leetle sweep o' ther blade," he muttered, "an' I kin fix them so 't they never take ther stage inter Tombstone. Shall I do it? No; I'll go straight ter Bush Brady, an' ef he an' his gang don't stop ther outfit I'm a liar."

He thrust the knife back in his belt, walked to the side of the selected horse, and sprung upon his back. The animal had some reluctance about leaving the camp and his companions when requested, but it was soon over, and Duke disappeared in the darkness.

Brimstone Bob did not awake until the first rays of the sun fell upon his face through the open stage-door. The sight of that gleam aroused him fully and at once, for he had directed Duke to call him at daybreak.

He sprung up and out of the vehicle, and looked for the young man. He was invisible; Bob could not see him anywhere. He did, however, see something which aroused him from what little languor remained.

One of the Horse Quartette was missing.

Bob looked all around, but by the time he had discovered the horse to be beyond eyesight, he had connected his disappearance with that of Dandy Duke.

Soft earth leaves a legible trail, and Bob hastened to investigate. His task was not hard. He found where Dandy Duke had prepared the horse and afterward rode away, and then his suspicions became convictions.

The ungrateful cowboy had robbed him of one of his cherished horses, and left the locality never to return.

He aroused the major and explained the case, and then the veteran roared his wrath like an angry lion. Such ingratitude had never before been heard of, he declared, and he heaped upon Duke's head every opprobrious name he could call to his mind.

Bob remained silent for some time, but his acute mind was busy and he finally interrupted.

"Major, I have an idea," he said.

"Fire it out!" gently roared the veteran.

"*Dandy Duke is Miles Bland!*"

The major leaped backward in such astonishment, and so suddenly, that his wooden leg failed to keep pace with his more nimble limb and body, and he fell flat in the sand. He briskly arose and brushed the stuff from the eyes.

"Why in blue thunderation didn't you say so before?" he howled, in great excitement.

"Because it has only just occurred to me."

"Perhaps you haven't heard me mention Miles Bland!" roared the veteran. "Perhaps I've forgotten to whisper his name to you! Perhaps—"

"No, sir: on the contrary, you've spoken it every five minutes. We've breakfasted, dined and supped on the name, and if it had been more durable we might have built a steam railroad to Tombstone and used the name for steel rails. Bottle up your choler, major, and let me explain."

"Button up my collar?" cried the major, in wrath, astonishment and a little deafness.

"What in thunder ails my collar, I'd like to know?"

"I said 'Bottle up your choler,' and it's advice you should take. You'll bu'st yet, in some spasm. You put on too much steam and you'll lose your cylinder-head."

Bob had taken just the right means to subdue his hot-headed employer, and under a return fire the hero of Vicksburg came down to common-sense and consented to hear that Bob merely suspected that Dandy Duke and Miles Bland were one.

Led by Bob, the major remembered the conversation which had taken place when he first mentioned Miles in Dandy Duke's presence. Then the cowboy had said some rather suggestive things, and Bob remembered that he had started when first asked if he had ever heard of Miles Bland.

It was but a suspicion, but both men agreed that it looked reasonable to suppose they had met the identical man who had wronged Karah Bragg out of her fortune.

Whether such was the fact or not, he had robbed them of a horse at the moment when his services were most needed, and there was a fire in Bob's eyes which spoke just as emphatically as loud words.

Not a great deal of time was lost, for Bob expected every moment to see the Apaches appear on their trail, but the three horses were arranged in position, and the journey to Tombstone resumed.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAVELERS MEET NEW FOES.

THE day, which had been very hot, came and went without new adventures, but the progress of the outfit was not rapid. Even Major Bragg, anxious as he was to reach Tombstone, lacked the hardness of heart to ask Brimstone Bob to urge the horses over the glittering sand in the hot sun.

The remnant of the Quartette was ready to do all that man could ask, and as Bragg looked at their foam-specked sides he once cautioned Bob not to injure them.

About the middle of the afternoon a halt was made which was to answer for a night's rest. Bob had declared that they must hereafter utilize the cooler hours for traveling and sleep during the middle of the day.

Bragg easily fell asleep as soon as they came to a halt and Bob attended to necessary matters. He was beginning to fear that food and water would run out before the desert was passed, and the last-named article, in particular, was sparingly served.

This dilemma had been forced upon them by the haste with which they had crossed the river. There they should have refilled the vessels containing water, but the chance had not been allowed them, and Bob looked grave as he marked the thirst of the horses.

To be caught on the desert without water for any length of time was a catastrophe too terrible to contemplate.

Bob gave the major over half of the sleeping time and then awoke him and exchanged positions. Bob lay down to sleep while Bragg arose to watch.

An hour and a half passed and darkness began to settle. Bob still slept. He was to be called at a certain time, then an hour distant, and the journey resumed. The major, tiring of doing nothing, and being no longer able to see through the darkness, sat down on the box, leaned back and began to think.

"There is no longer danger," he muttered. "As long as I can't see any Apaches, no Apaches can see us."

It came to pass that the major accidentally fell asleep. When he awoke a terrible din sounded in his ears.

Suspecting that they were attacked by Apaches, he drew his revolver, and at that moment two men staggered into view in front of the vehicle, clasped in each other's arms, but in a grasp far from friendly. One of them he recognized as Bob, and comprehending that his young friend was in danger, he sprung down and rushed to his rescue.

Unluckily, the wagon pole was in the way, and as the major's flesh-and-blood toe caught on it his wooden leg failed to catch him and he went down in a heap, once more filling his eyes with sand.

He was soon up, but by the time he could see clearly the scene had changed. The fight was over; Brimstone Bob was invisible, and the Apaches were dimly to be seen rushing away in the darkness.

Bragg comprehended that through a lack of numbers or some other cause they had seen fit to take a hurried departure, and he began to look anxiously for Bob, expecting to find him with his head neatly halved by a hatchet or minus the hairy growth nature had planted there.

He failed to find him; he searched the whole vicinity, but not a sign did he see of his friend and guide.

"It's villainously queer!" he commented. "They can't have— But, no; he must be near. Bob! I say, Bob!"

There was no answer.

"Hello!"

Even echo scorned to answer.

"Bob! Thunderation and fiery pitch-forks, where are you, Bob?"

Impressive as was this call, it failed to do any good. Profound silence followed, and when he had once more made the circuit of the camp he could no longer doubt but that Brimstone Bob had been carried off by the Apaches.

"It's a villainous shame!" he cried, striking his clinched hand on the wagon foot-board as though that were in some way to blame for the affair. "That young fellow is a thoroughbred, and it's a villainous shame, I say, that the Apaches have got him. I'll mount a horse and go to the rescue."

He had taken half a dozen steps when he stopped short and uttered a fresh roar.

"Jericho and jim-jams! the horses are gone, too!"

So they were, though he had but just noticed the fact. The charge of the Apaches had left only the wagon and himself; Bob and his horses were prisoners.

Bragg sat down on the pole, quite overcome. Where, then, was hope of reaching Tombstone?

He was in the midst of a desert which even Bob, with all his experience, had dreaded, and nothing in the world except his legs was at his disposal as a means of getting out of it.

And Tombstone lay far away.

He had heard Bob say that they would not pass the desert until thirty-six hours later. How long would it take him to walk it?

In propounding the inquiry he momentarily forgot that he was an old man with a wooden leg. When he remembered it, he felt a thrill of fear which Graveyard Bastion had not occasioned in the old days.

He arose hastily, entered the wagon and looked at the supply of food and water. There seemed to be a plenty of each, but how was the water to be carried? He could not draw the wagon, nor carry the barrel, and the flask which he held would not last more than half a day.

"Fiery pitch-forks!" he ejaculated. "I'm in a most villainous fix. It'll take me four days to get out of the desert, and I'll die of thirst before then. Thunderation! I can't walk it; I might as well try to fly. I don't know the direction; I haven't a compass; I can't see to hold a direct course by night and the hot sun would turn me over if I tried it to-day. I may as well settle down and take what comes, but I do reckon I've found my Graveyard Bastion."

The idea was natural and the major was in a bad and dangerous situation. He had not overestimated all this, for stronger men than he had died in that desert and left their bones unburied to bleach in the broiling sun and grin at the more fortunate traveler as he passed.

"I am like a shipwrecked mariner," thought Bragg. "This waste of sand is the wide ocean; this wagon is my frail boat. I am adrift, rudderless, without compass, none too well stocked with food and almost without hope of being picked up by another craft. Pleasant, by Jericho!"

The major's gloomy mood lasted for some time, but he finally aroused and tried to busy his mind and feet at one and the same time. He made short journeys about the wagon and pretended to be waiting for Brimstone Bob.

But Bob did not come; the hours and the night wore on and there was no sign of him.

Toward morning Bragg grew sleepy and ventured to lie down in the wagon. When he awoke the sun was an hour high.

No other wagon, or horse, or man, or tree was in sight. He was literally alone on the desert. And the yellow sand glistened and seemed to burn and writhe under the sun which was creeping up the eastern sky like a great ball of fire.

"Fiery pitch-forks, but this is a most villainous fix," he observed, gloomily. "How the dickens am I to get out of it alive, I'd like to know?"

The forenoon was passed in irresolution. If he had possessed the means of carrying water, he would have pushed on and taken his chances, but as the half-pint flask was his only vessel of the kind he lacked the courage—or, more properly, the rashness—to quit the wagon.

As the hours wore on his mood vacillated like a pendulum. At times he assured himself he should soon be chanced upon by white men and

saved; anon, he grew intensely gloomy and believed he should die in the desert.

The warnings he had received at Digger's Delight came back to him. He had been told that it was sure death to go out on the Ginger Trail at that time, and up to that time all had gone as he had been warned.

Only the last act in the drama was wanting.

It came to pass that, as Bragg lay sleeping in the wagon, a little before dark, a dark object appeared at the western horizon.

It advanced, grew larger, assumed form, and revealed itself as being of a dozen parts, and each part an Apache warrior. They were advancing straight toward the wagon.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAJOR BRAGG TALKS APACHE.

THE group of horsemen drew nearer, but Bragg slept on, unconscious of their approach. They had seen the wagon and were making directly for it, for though it seemed deserted, there might be a chance for some species of plunder.

They arrived, halted, and dismounted, but the major knew nothing of it. Red faces peered in at the stage-door, but he saw them not.

When he awoke he was under the momentary impression that the Horse Quartette was dragging him over the desert by the legs, but when he got his eyes fairly open it was to see that he was being pulled from the wagon by grim Apache warriors, heels first.

He was deposited on the sand, where, as he showed no signs of resistance, he was allowed to sit upright.

It was plain that he was not to be instantly scalped, and as he had his own private opinion as to the best way to get along peaceably with the noble red-man—every one east of the Mississippi has a clear, logical, and infallible opinion on this subject—he proceeded to put it into effect.

"My dear sir," he said, extending his hand to the nearest warrior, "this is an unexpected pleasure."

"Wah!" observed the modern Tecumseh, but he neglected to take the hand; an oversight Bragg did not try to correct, nor did he deem it prudent to arise.

"When did you arrive in town?" he continued.

"Wah!" tersely answered Tecumseh.

"I am not sure I understand."

"Wah!"—merely this and nothing more.

"He don't understand English," thought the major, and then gave himself up to thought. He did not understand Apache, and he couldn't see how they were to converse.

His next idea may have been occasioned by seeing his neighbor finger his knife. Bragg's hair seemed to arise, and he had a brilliant theory.

"Perhaps he understands Latin and French. I'll try him!"

It was certainly a reckless decision, since the veteran's sole knowledge of these languages had been gathered from the back of his dictionary, and he was far from being a proficient. Again, it was not likely Poor Lo had ever enjoyed the blessed privileges of Webster's Unabridged.

"Apache *e pluribus unum; et tu, Brute!*" he said, with his most winning smile.

No reply.

"*Je suis pret, mon ami!*"

Still dead silence from Mr. Lo. Latin didn't affect him, and he was proof against the lulling influences of French. The major might have spent the time wasted on "the languages" to just as good advantage by surveying the pictured flags of nations which embellish the Unabridged.

The fact dawned upon him, and as his neighbor—the rest of the gang were ransacking the wagon—had drawn his knife and was feeling of its edge, the perspiration started freely from every pore of the hero of Vicksburg.

"The mountain won't come to me; I must go to it," he thought. "He don't understand English, Latin or French; I must talk Apache!"

A more reckless decision was never made by an old soldier, but with the same warm blood surging through his veins which he had felt at Graveyard Bastion, he wiped away the perspiration and went in.

"Heliogabolus, fee, faw, fum. Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard; six times six are thirty-six."

Bragg looked anxiously, to see if this extract from what he knew about the Apache language would hit home. His anxious eyes were raised from the carving-knife to Mr. Lo's face, and he studied it as though he were wrestling with the inscription on Cleopatra's needle.

Oh! for one gleam of pity! Ha! the mouth of Mr. Lo opens. He is about to speak! The major leans forward to catch the soft Apache words.

"*You're an infernal fool!*"

So spoke the noble red-man, and Bragg's eyes grew larger than ever. No Apache, nor Latin, nor French, was that; but plain, though guttural, English. The noble red-man had not been on Uncle Sam's reservation for nothing.

What would have come next is uncertain, for the flask of whisky was just then discovered and all rushed to sample it. Bragg thought of running, but his wooden leg was against him and he sat still.

Anon, the warriors turned to his side and proceeded to pluck him like a fowl. One took his hat, a second his coat, his pockets were gone through and his watch and other trinkets admired and appropriated, and then they settled down upon his boots like locusts.

The first came off all right, but the second stuck. There was a good reason for this, which the major would have explained if he had been allowed time, but in a frantic effort to secure the boot he was nearly pulled in two—and then he who held the boot suddenly sat down on the sand.

He had secured the boot, but he also secured something more. Two-thirds of the major's leg was in his grasp, the portion below that which the cannon-ball of '64 had left him.

A long, open-mouthed silence followed, during which the Apaches stared in blank amazement at the wooden leg. Nothing like this had ever occurred in their experience before.

They had mixed with Uncle Sam until they had many of his habits, his ideas and his vir-

ties. When they went on the war-path they killed white settlers with guns furnished them by Uncle Sam; they drank the whisky of the white man, they swore his pet oaths, they talked his language after a fashion; and in many ways they had become Americanized.

But never before had they seen a man pulled apart like a fishing-rod nor had they seen wooden legs grow on men, or men grow on wooden legs.

No wonder they stared.

When they recovered their mental equilibrium a little, they decided to keep their distance from the major—and did so. They left him alone, but took his wooden leg, and at the other side of the wagon, in the gathering gloom, held an earnest inquest over this new marvel in natural history.

The major did not venture to interrupt them. They had left very little that belonged to him, but he felt that he would be fortunate if he got out of the scrape with his able-bodied leg and his hair in their place.

During this pause night had fully fallen, and the surrounding desert was indistinguishable, except immediately around the camp, but while Bragg sat there in the sand, there was a tremendous chorus of yells, and several horsemen emerged from the gloom.

Unable to run and without a weapon, the major crawled under the wagon. From there he saw the new-comers dash upon the Apaches like so many thunderbolts, and as the attack was a surprise, there was but a brief strife before the red-men were all gone.

For the new-comers were white-skinned; and when Bragg saw that they really held the field, he crawled from under the wagon.

One of the strangers seemed to be looking for some one, for he saw him at once, and he no sooner saw than he burst into a loud laugh.

His shout attracted the attention of his companions, and then all laughed in concert.

Really it was no wonder. The major's sole attire consisted of his shirt, pants and one stocking, while one leg was gone at the knee. His bald head gleamed in the darkness like a billiard-ball on its green cloth.

Bragg, however, felt like anything rather than laughing. He had recognized the first of these scoffers; he was Dandy Duke.

There was no need for Bragg to introduce himself, as was soon shown.

"Thunderation! you look like a scorched rat!" cried the cowboy. "Nothin' left on you 'cept pin-feathers, by George! Ha! ha! ha!"

The other men roared in concert, and the major saw that they were all young, rough-looking, devil may-care fellows, doubtless cowboys, like Duke.

"Where's the horse you stole?" he tartly asked.

"Over yonder," replied Duke, pointing to the group of animals and not in the least abashed.

"Didn't expect to see me back, I suppose?"

"Yes, for you left some plunder behind."

"Where's ther other horses?"

Bragg briefly explained what had become of Brimstone Bob and his three black steeds.

"Sorry ter lose ther horses," said Dandy Duke. "Es fur Bob, he's peromably out'n his

mis'ry afore now. His skulp would be oncom-mon precious ter a 'Pach."

He grimaced at the major, but the latter forbore to storm as usual. He realized that if Dandy Duke was Miles Bland, as he suspected, he might not be in safe company, and the wise man lies low when the blizzard is out.

For some reason or other the cowboys did not wish to lose much time at the camp. They prepared to depart and take the major with them, and he assumed to be pleased at the prospect.

When they rode away, Bragg went in a sad plight. The Apaches had taken his hat, coat and boots, and without these, and with his uncovered wooden leg, he looked so forlorn and broken up, that Dandy Duke roared again.

"I say, Old Rat," he facetiously observed, "you've got a close clip this time, eh? Burnt prairies ain't nowhar ter see. Boyees, won't he enjoy it ter-morrer?"

The boys seemed to think he would, or, as Bragg suspected, that they would enjoy it; and at the thought of the blistering sun beating down on his uncovered head, he began to despair.

The men of Digger's Delight had not exaggerated when they described the Ginger Trail.

Influenced by the gloomy outlook, the major would have taken to his horse's heels, or, more properly, have made a dash, had it not been for his poor horsemanship. This has before been referred to in its proper place.

Slow as the cowboys went it was torture for the veteran, and he was not sorry when Duke fell in by his side and opened conversation.

"Old Rat," he said, in his very impolite way, "I've got something to say to you."

"Speak on," said Bragg.

"I reckon I've got a clew ter whar Miles Bland hangs out, or at least, whar he now is."

"Where is that?" the major eagerly asked, momentarily losing his suspicions.

"Right hyar, Old Rat!"

Bragg came down to a practical basis.

"Meaning yourself?"

"Yes, sir; I'm ther rooster; I'm Miles Bland; I'm your brother's nephew an' ther man that heired his property when it was showed that that thar gal, Karah, warn't his daughter."

"You're a villainous liar!" shouted Bragg. "Fiery pitch-forks! I'll thrash you if you dare say that again. You villainous scoundrel, you!"

"Soft an' easy, Old Rat. I hold ther ribbons in this hyar case, by Bush Brady's permission, an' you want ter fly low."

Bragg aimed a blow at the cowboy, but the latter caught his arm and held it with a tenacious grip.

"Bottle up yer temper, Old Rat, or I'll do it fer yer. Nary blow will I take from you, but jest let us git out o' ther desert and I'll show you Karah. We needn't go ter Tombstone ter see her, fur I've got her hived elsewhar. We're gwine thar now. Smoke that!"

So saying, Dandy Duke, or Miles Bland, to give him his real name, rode to the head of the column and the major was left to pick the confusion out of his mind and try to get the tangled web straight.

CHAPTER IX.

BRIMSTONE BOB TAKES THE TRAIL.

NIGHT!

At one point of the desert a dozen men were in camp.

There were those Bedouins of the American plains, Apache warriors. Near them their horses ate of the forage carried along with them, for the desert furnished none.

All were not copper-skinned. One, though bronzed, was of white skin and American blood.

He was Brimstone Bob.

Our young friend had been twenty-four hours in captivity, and though he had been subjected to no great injury, he was tired of it, and was even then planning escape.

The Indians had untied his hands so that he could eat, but as his feet were tied with thongs which they knew it would trouble him to untie in less than half an hour, they paid little attention to him.

On his own part, he realized the nature of the knot, and did not meddle with it. Instead, he rolled over.

With great caution he worked his way until he thought a proper distance had been passed, and then he arose to his feet after some difficulty.

A moment more and a shrill, peculiar whistle rung out on the air; a sound which caused the for once negligent Apaches to arouse from their feeding and look about for the cause.

It had another effect.

No sooner did the whistle sound than the three black horses stolen at the same time Bob was captured, erected their ears, drank in the sound, and then shot toward their master.

Past the Apaches they went at a hard gallop, straight toward Bob, and he saw his chance before him. It was to fling himself upon the back of one of the blacks—a work few people would have thought possible when his feet were bound.

The horses came down side by side at a hard gallop, and with an unerring grasp he caught at the nearest, flinging his arms about his neck, and in a moment more was on his back.

Then away in the darkness sped the trio, and the taunting laugh sent back by Bob assured the Apaches that their bullets had gone wild.

They mounted and pursued, but they saw no more of Bob that night; the gallant blacks were not to be run down by any ordinary horses.

When Bob saw that he had really distanced them, he moderated his pace and gave his attention to freeing his ankles. This was the work of a good deal of time, but it succeeded at last.

Still, there were dangers and pitfalls in the way. He hadn't a weapon upon him—not even a penknife—and this on Ginger Trail, where the Apache roved red-handed. In case of an encounter he would be without any hope except what lay in the heels of his horses.

Again, he was heading straight back into the desert, and as there wasn't a spot of grass or fountain of water for miles, his hope of escaping actual suffering lay in happening upon the wagon he had deserted without his own leave.

Nor was it all; Bragg's life might depend on

this same chance. He hoped that gentleman would not stray away from the stage.

In the morning Brimstone Bob looked and saw his wagon not more than a mile away.

He was soon beside it.

Until the last moment he had hoped the major might be inside, but it was deserted. It had nearly been even more forlorn; there were signs that some one had tried to set it on fire, and though Bob did not know who, the reader will easily see the handiwork of the cowboys.

Bob now found himself in possession of all his valuable property except one horse, and had it not been for Bragg's absence he would have been quite cheerful; but the major was missing and he knew his duty.

He must be found.

Experienced in trail-reading, he soon made out one fact. A number of horsemen had a few hours before left the spot and rode away a little west of south, and Bragg had gone with them.

The marks of his wooden leg, where he mounted his horse, were as plain as a written account.

Why his leg had been bootless, and a good deal else about the place, Bob could not understand, but one thing appealed straight to his comprehension.

In the sand he found a fine breech-loading rifle, and though he lacked ammunition beyond what was in it, the fact that it was a sixteen-shot revolving weapon made it most valuable.

He looked in vain for a knife or revolver, but finding neither, attached his horses to the stage and rolled away on the trail of Bragg and his companions.

He pushed on briskly, only taking a necessary halt in the heat of the day. The night which followed was duly improved until within four hours of day. Then another halt was made, and Bob lay down for just that amount of sleep.

When he awoke day had dawned, but no enemy had come near to molest or make afraid.

Looking ahead, however, Bob saw that he was nearly out of the desert. Directly ahead, was a long, low line of green which marked a wood. Further to the right was a dark, brownish line, a good deal higher, and this he knew to be a mountain.

He believed he recognized the place, though he had never seen it nearer than then. If so, he was northwest of Tombstone—a supposition which seemed likely from the direction last traveled.

He now began to feel the need of caution. If the major's companions were captors, as he suspected, it would not do to ride boldly into their midst.

Acting on this idea, he once more got in motion and moved briskly for the base of the mountain. He reached the fringe of trees at its foot without seeing a living creature.

Having gained the cover, he left his team somewhat concealed, and started off to investigate the trail he had abandoned, but no more than a quarter of a mile had been passed, when he suddenly stopped.

Several horses were in sight, grazing among the trees, and having an air of being at home

which impressed the young man a good deal. He also saw evidence of such occupancy of the grove on former occasions, and he drew a conclusion at once.

The men he had followed were in the wood; more, they had made it their home on more than one occasion, if not regularly.

All this served to show the need of caution, for it was a painful fact that the Apaches were not the only marauders on the Arizona plains. Perhaps a regular road-agent band lived in the wood, though how they could get a living off the immediate country was not clear.

Brimstone Bob went cautiously on, and at the end of a hundred yards he saw a building before him—one little more than a cabin, but spacious enough and evidently occupied by human beings.

Nor was this all; a man sat just outside the door, his back against the wall, and slowly and contentedly smoked his pipe.

Bob surveyed him critically. He was young, but there was a free-and-easy, lawless air about him not especially inviting. The watcher, seeing no more just then, lay down in a thicket and prepared to watch.

Perhaps half an hour elapsed, and then the door opened and several other young men came out, all of whom scattered about the immediate vicinity, produced their pipes and began to smoke.

Bob still looked, and with two results. First, it was his opinion that these young fellows were, or had been, cowboys somewhere; and, secondly, he recognized one of them.

It was Dandy Duke again.

The discovery cleared Bob's mind. He had believed Duke to be Miles Bland, but even if he was not, his true character had appeared and he could not doubt but that he had led the cowboys back to rob him (Bob) of what Duke had not been able to take when he stole the horse.

He suspected that the cowboys had just had their breakfast, and that few if any were left in the house. By gaining the rear he might be able to look the place over and himself remain unseen.

Acting on this idea he lost no time in attempting to make the change as planned, nor did he fail to succeed in the first step.

He approached the rear in a slow and cautious way. With the exception of one thick group of small mesquites, the horses had browsed down all the underbrush, but the larger trees gave a degree of shelter and he managed to gain the shadow of the wall.

The building did not boast a light of glass, but there were various openings, and Bob proceeded to use one of these.

He gained a view of the interior and was not surprised at what he saw.

Major Bragg sat in one corner of the room, which was little more than a pen, and was engaged in eating, but the circumstances under which he ate, menaced by a stout young fellow of an evil appearance, showed him a prisoner.

CHAPTER X.

THE COWBOYS' LAIR.

BRIMSTONE BOB was not in the least surprised

at what he saw, but it showed him that he had done wisely to proceed with caution, and that he must use the same caution in the future if he wished to get the major out of trouble.

The men in Dandy Duke's company were undoubtedly of the same stripe as that young rascal, and if he showed himself to them it would render Bragg's chances very small if not get himself into serious trouble.

He must watch his chance for liberating him.

He still stood at his post when the cowboy raised his voice.

"Come, old man, hurry up," he said. "I can't spend the whole day in getting your breakfast into you."

"Who in thunderation asked you to?" demanded the veteran, in his usual manner. "Go outside and begin gambling again; that's what you hanker after, and I'm able to feed myself. Your room is better than your company. Clear out!"

"Let up, here!" cried the cowboy, "or you won't get anything more to eat."

"Just as you say; take it away. The sight of your face spoils my appetite."

"How about that?"

The young ruffian doubled his fist and thrust it close to Bragg's face.

"That's a slight improvement," Bragg unwaveringly answered, "but I advise you to wash it and resume occupation according to the homestead law; there's dirt enough!"

What would have been the result of this rash speech is uncertain, if nothing new had occurred, but something new did occur. From one of the side-doors a light, fairy-like form ran out and toward the major, who was in a moment more folded in a loving embrace.

Brimstone Bob looked in amazement. The new-comer was a young and beautiful girl, younger than the watcher and dazzlingly pretty, and she seemed wholly out of place in that abode of wickedness. But Bob gained light even while he wondered.

"Don't you do it, Karah!" Bragg exclaimed. "Keep those white arms away or you'll weaken me, and the Lord knows I need strength now."

Bob started. The girl had been called Karah, and as that was the name of the veteran's niece, it was pretty clear that it was she whom he saw.

How this came about he could easily see. Dandy Duke had discovered that the major was moving to upset his plans to rob Karah, and he had taken a bold stand in the matter of abducting both.

Close behind the girl, however, had followed an old woman of most unprepossessing looks, and she now took a hand in the scene, ordering Karah to return to the other room.

But the major clasped one arm around her and thumped his wooden leg on the floor as vigorously as though he was learning to play the base drum.

"Get out of this, you witch!" he roared. "What do you mean by coming between me and my niece? If you wasn't a woman, I'd double you up and chuck you out of the window. Clear out, all of you! Karah stays with me after this."

The cowboy coolly stepped to the door and called to some one.

Brimstone Bob knew how the rebellion would end, but the time had not yet come for him to aid the major. To appear then would be to bring ruin upon both of them.

Dandy Duke soon entered. He had wholly thrown off his mask, and his lawless swagger became a brutal menace when he heard of Bragg's stand.

"Look right here, old fellow," he said, shaking his finger at the major, "I won't have any such nonsense as this. I'm ruin' this hyer bone-yard, an' while I'm at it you had better lay low. Gal, go back ter ther other room, straight-way!"

Bragg thundered out an indignant epithet, but the girl was evidently wise for one of her years, and though she showed no signs of fear, she at once stooped, kissed the major, and beat a retreat, followed by the old woman.

A violent quarrel followed between Duke and the major, but amounted to little. The latter was powerless, and Duke was so confident in his power that he often laughed even when storming.

Brimstone Bob was a most interested observer of all this. Matters began to assume a new aspect. Karah Bragg was the prisoner of a man who intended, at the most moderate estimate, to rob her of her fortune; and honor and chivalry, as well as his engagement with the major, demanded that Bob do all in his power to rescue her and her uncle.

How, then, was the rescue to be effected?

Karah having cut short the altercation inside by going back through the door from which she had come, the major finally submitted to having his hands bound and all became quiet on the surface.

Brimstone Bob, however, was not in a placid mood. He was resolved to rescue the prisoners, and to do it called for no small degree of effort and shrewdness. He felt that the old woman would be a more zealous watcher than the volatile cowboys, so he planned to rescue the major first.

Dandy Duke soon went out, leaving the same man as a guard. The latter settled down in a chair and began to smoke steadily, while Bragg kept his corner in a mood not far from sulky.

Bob devoted the next half-hour to considering how he could best accomplish his object, but we need scarcely say that he decided to wait for nightfall before making any movement.

The next thing was to retreat from his position, something not easily done; but he managed so well that he was not seen, and ultimately reached the place where his horses had been left.

The sun was nearing the horizon, and he only delayed to make a light supper, and then started for where he had left the cowboys. The scene had not changed, and Bob began to feel a good deal of hope.

He gained the shelter of the mesquite bushes before mentioned, and then awaited darkness.

It soon came, and though it had the unfavorable result of gathering the young roughs in the shanty, he prepared for work.

Creeping along to the wall, he soon had a view

of the main room. What he saw was not pleasing. Dandy Duke and his followers had settled down to "make an evening" of it, evidently, for every visible man was playing cards, smoking, and keeping watch of the black bottle, which somehow had a part in the game.

In this same room was Major Bragg, bound as before, and so situated that it seemed impossible to get him out unseen.

Such being the case, Bob decided to look for Karah, and to lose no time in doing so.

He moved around to the rear of the building again, and guided by a light at one point, ventured to raise his head above the sill, and look inside. He saw an empty room, but beyond it was an open door, and he plainly saw the girl.

She was sitting in a drooping position, and her expression was melancholy; but it only served to increase Bob's zeal. He felt that it would be a great thing to save so fair a girl from her persecutors, and as he could not expect a more favorable opportunity, he resolved to act at once.

With arms so strong as his it was not hard to draw himself up to the aperture which served as a window. Once there he paused to listen for a moment, and then lowered himself softly to the floor.

It now became a vital question whether Karah was alone in the next room. If so, it would be easy to get her away; but the chances were so against it that he did not dare to attract her attention.

Cautiously he glided forward until he reached the door. Karah had not changed her position. He glanced inside. Except for her occupancy, the room was empty.

It was a chance for which he had scarcely dared hope, and with a new light in his eyes, he hurriedly, but softly, crossed the floor. Speaking Karah's name, he drew her attention without an alarm, and in a moment more was at her side.

"Have no fear," he said, quickly. "I am Major Bragg's friend and yours. I have come to rescue you—"

He paused as a strange look crossed her face and directed his gaze in the same direction as her own. There he saw ample cause for alarm; the old woman was again on the scene and her eyes were turned on him in a most suspicious way.

"Hoity-toity!" she exclaimed, "what are you doing here, my young gallows-bird?"

Reading her manner quickly, he knew he had been mistaken for one of the band, and he resolved to make the most of the chance.

"Ther cap'in wants ter know ef you can't fix some sorter mixed drink," he explained, in the rude language common to the cowboys.

"He does, eh? Hang the young serpent! Of course I can. You can't stump Old Bet on any such rock as that. Ther ain't a drink knowed ter ther West which I can't mix. Same time, I hate ter do it fur such idle, good-for-nothing critters as you. But I will."

She moved toward the door, evidently to ask Dandy Duke what he would have mixed, but as it was not a part of Bob's plan to have the whole gang of cowboys on top of him, he prepared for active work.

Catching her arm as she was passing, he thrust his revolver close to her nose.

"Hold, there!" he tersely said. "Dare to give an alarm and I will make it a fatal indiscretion for you!"

CHAPTER XI.

A CLOSE CALL.

THIS turn of affairs plainly astonished Old Bet a good deal, and for a moment she lacked power even to make a reply. Brimstone Bob improved the chance to increase the impression he had made.

"I'm a desperate man, old lady, and I won't have any slip-up here. You are my prisoner, and as such I mean to hold you. Don't dare to make a cry, or to resist!"

Old Bet had by this time recovered her wits, and she demanded to know what he meant, her language being more forcible than polite.

"All in good time," Bob serenely answered. "Just now we're not giving full statistics. All you've got to do is to be sharp and say nothing. Young lady," to Karah, "I'll trouble you to bring the strings I see yonder."

The prospect of being bound enraged Old Bet. She was wise enough to read Bob's expression and not to risk an alarm, but she snapped her toothless jaws and made some appropriate remarks about cutting him into mince-meat—a threat Bob heard with unwavering coolness.

Karah looked pale and frightened, but she obeyed his directions promptly and brought the cords. He then asked her to hold his revolver, keeping the muzzle turned on Bet, and applied the cords to the old woman in a scientific way.

A gag was his final gift to her, at which her eyes flashed in a way which made Karah turn her head away.

Bob stowed his prisoner into a corner where she would not be found at first glance, and then went again to Karah.

"I've got a little something to say, and I'll come right down to business," he remarked. "If you've had any talk with Major Bragg you must know he set out for Tombstone with one guide—"

"He did say so," interrupted the girl.

"I'm the chap," said Bob, coolly. "Well, I now hope to get you two out of this, but if I try for the major right away I'll most likely lose the advantage I now have. First thing of all is to get you clear. See?"

"Do what you think best. If I could help uncle— But I can't. Do what you think best."

"That's sensible," said Bob, approvingly. "Well, just follow me and I'll take you out of this in a jiffy."

He proceeded to keep his promise and led the way to the other room. They then went through the window. Under the trees the night was dark, and as all remained silent there seemed ground for hope that they would make good their escape.

They had gone but a few yards, however, when Bob, who never failed to use his eyes, discovered some creeping thing in advance and at once halted.

Bidding Karah keep her place he went forward to investigate. He believed he had seen a

man, but the improbability that one of the cowboys would be sneaking about in such a way led him to hope other and more honest men were on the scene.

The creeper was no longer visible, but he believed it was behind a certain large tree, and set out to discover if such was the fact. For this work he was well fitted and he wormed toward the tree almost noiselessly. He began to think the creeper had been a fancy of his mind, for not a sign of him was then visible. Still, he abated no degree of caution and went steadily on.

Not going directly to the tree, he made a little *detour* and advanced to where he could view it at a safe distance. He raised his head and looked. The outline of a human form, of a man crouching behind the tree, was plainly visible, but before Bob had time to investigate further something else occurred.

Rough and strong hands seized him from behind. He was jerked to his feet and an iron grasp closed over his neck. Then he was whirled around, backed up against a tree and given the use of his eyes.

Other men were visible. A full dozen stood before him; wild, lawless-looking fellows who needed no introduction to one like Brimstone Bob. He recognized them as Apache warriors; fresh trouble had come to him by the road.

He awaited for them to address him, but, instead, they muttered among themselves, speaking so low and gutturally that he could distinguish only an occasional word. What they were saying soon became clear.

There was a sudden change in their manner, which then became freshly hostile. Bob was jammed closer to the tree and one brawny fellow stepped before him, spear in hand. The prisoner suspected what was coming but struggled in vain. The spear was drawn back for the fatal stroke and then came darting forward.

Brimstone Bob, wholly helpless in the hands of so many foes, did not for a moment suppose he had any hope of escape; he had resigned himself to his fate with the silent calmness of a brave man; but much to his surprise the spear missed his flesh, and, passing between his body and arm, struck the tree with a dull thud.

He resolved to feign death. Accordingly he allowed his head to fall forward and his body to become limp in the hands of his captors, and when the spear had been withdrawn and their hold relaxed, he fell to the ground in the most orthodox corpse-fashion.

Very much to his surprise no further attention was bestowed upon him. The Apaches muttered gutturally, their movements were audible for a brief space of time, and then all became still.

He opened his eyes. Not an Apache was visible.

In a moment more he was again the cool Brimstone Bob who had won a name from Austin to Yuma, and he bounded to his feet with his thoughts fixed on Karah. Unless he calculated wrongly, the cowboys were about to suffer an attack, and the sooner the girl was cared for the better.

He hurried toward where he had left her and

briefly explained that a rapid retreat had become advisable. She asked no questions, but, taking his hand, glided away in the darkness.

No foe barred their way, but the drama at the rear was not long delayed. There was a shout, a rifle-crack, a chorus of yells plainly Apache, and then other rifle-shots burst out and a tremendous tumult began.

"What is that?" cried Karah, with a little feminine scream.

"Hush!" warned Bob. "Have no fear, but trust me and I will bring you through."

The Apaches were at hand again.

He placed himself in front of Karah and drew both his revolvers. Once he shouted to the red demons to keep back, but the order was as useless as he expected it would be, and then he began work in a style he had seen practiced all along the Arizona border from Yuma to Tombstone.

Working both revolvers at the same time he sent out a stream of fire, and something worse, from each hand, and the lead whistled into the Apache group in a free and fatal style.

Right and left the new-comer laid about him, knocking the Apaches about like ten-pins, and then with a glad neigh of recognition a coal-black horse darted to Brimstone Bob's side.

It was one of the Horse Quartette, the one missing since Dandy Duke deserted on the desert, and he had nobly shown that he was true to his former master. With hoof and teeth he had fought his way through the Indians to where he had heard the familiar voice.

It was a glad recognition for Bob, and he at once turned to Karah and bade her mount.

Luckily, she had not once lost her presence of mind, and as Bob sent his last shots home she sprang on the animal's back. The Apaches were still a little dazed by what had occurred, and Bob lost no time.

With a yell which would have done credit to even the savages, he followed Karah and gave his black steed the word to go. A second command was not needed. With what almost seemed like a derisive and triumphant shout, and regardless of his double burden, the noble animal sprang forward through what remained of the Indians.

They tried to stop him, but one went down under Bob's revolver, and a second received an iron hoof in his temple which sent him coursing into the by-and-by, and then away sped the black horse.

Of course there was some show of pursuit, but it amounted to but little. None of the pursuers had their horses ready, and those who started on foot soon gave up the chase.

As for Bob, he decided not to tarry in the vicinity any longer. He had done far better than he had really dared hope, and with Karah's arms around him, he resolved to devote every energy and resource at his command to the attempt to baffle her enemies.

CHAPTER XII.

BRIMSTONE BOB TRIES AGAIN.

NOT until all sounds had died away behind them, did Brimstone Bob direct his black steed to go at a slower pace. Excited as the gallant

animal was, he would have kept on until utterly exhausted, but Bob did not allow him to lose his wind.

He reined him in at last, and looked back.

"Are we pursued?" Karah asked, with a shiver.

"I see no sign of it, but in any case I have no fear. We have a horse here which can't be beaten by any in Arizona."

"But there are so many of those dreadful Apaches. Ugh! I believe they turned my blood to water."

"Let us hope they and the cowboys will chew each other up—though from the way in which I was so oddly saved from the spear, at the tree, I suspect there is one, at least, among them who is not all brute."

"But my uncle—what of him?"

Bob did not answer at once.

"I'm a little shaky about him," he finally confessed. "True, Dandy Duke don't seem inclined to hurt him just now, but the major is rash, and there is no knowing what'll be the result of his habit of speaking his mind."

"Miles Bland swears he shall never see Tombstone."

"I suppose Bland and Dandy Duke are one?"

"Uncle Bragg called him Dandy Duke, but his real name is Miles Bland."

"I see. Well, he's a desperate young ruffian, in any case."

"He is, indeed, as I well know. He has a good mother—his father died years ago—who tried to guide him aright, but he was born bad. He might have had an easy and peaceful life, but he was crazy for the wilder life around him—and for misdemeanors. I believe that if the law claimed all who break it, here in Arizona, Miles Bland would not now be at liberty."

She spoke with a mixture of sorrow and natural indignation, but Bob was looking for the place where he had left his team, and made no reply.

Having placed the horse with his mates, and pausing for a moment to witness the pleasure of the quartette at the reunion, Bob conducted Kara to what he hoped would be a secure place.

Once at their ease, Bob heard the story of the girl's misfortunes. Miles Bland had always hated her because she stood between him and a fortune, and a short time before he had put measures on foot to prove that she was not the daughter of the late Mr. Bragg. Knowing that justice was not always to be had in Tombstone, Karah had sent for her uncle, the major, but before Bland's claim was decided, he got into trouble about another matter and had to flee, taking refuge with a party of depraved young fellows, whom he usually ruled when he saw fit to keep their company.

These were the so-called cowboys.

It was immediately after this that Bland met Bob and the major on the desert, and the encounter so alarmed him that, regardless of the fact that they had saved his life, he stole one of Bob's horses, hastened to his allies and arranged for Karah's abduction, and then returned to the desert as we have seen.

All this became clear to Bob through Karah's explanation, and he saw that they had a danger-

ous foe in Bland. Beyond much doubt he had repulsed the Apaches, but in no degree would this benefit our friends.

The Indians would still be left in such numbers as to wander about and use their eyes altogether too much, and Bland would miss no chance to recapture Karah.

Knowing all this, Bob finally said as much to his companion, adding:

"I believe it is advisable for me to seek to rescue the major at once."

The girl started perceptibly.

"You surely will not venture into the midst of those terrible men!" she exclaimed.

"You forget what is at stake."

"But they will kill you."

"I trust not. In any case, it would be hardly manly for me to neglect Major Bragg."

"I should be the last person to wish you to desert the uncle who has come so nobly to my aid, but you must not forget yourself. You are young—"

Karah paused with perceptible confusion, evidently not wishing to give all the reasons which led her to fear for the youth's safety. Bob felt his heart beat quicker, for he had not escaped unscathed from the power of the girl's bright eyes, and it was pleasant to feel that she cared for his future.

"I have forgotten nothing in making my decision," he said gently, "but I must not be deaf to the calls of humanity. I must try to help the major. So far as I am concerned, this amounts to but little. It was because I was such a wild fellow, half a dozen years ago, that I got the name of Brimstone Bob, and it hangs to me. Now, my only fear is for you."

"For me?"

"Yes."

Karah laughed.

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Of what?"

"Of being afraid."

"Exactly," said the young man, triumphantly. "You are as brave as any one when yourself is concerned. Then why will you try to make me afraid?"

"I won't," she said, impulsively. "If you think best, you shall go, and I'll pray for you; but you'll be careful?"

"Yes, but there's no one to mourn if I fall. I'm without a relative in the world. There's no one to mourn for Brimstone Bob."

"You must think very poorly of me, to say that. You have done so much for me, and been so brave, and—"

She paused in evident confusion, but Bob's eyes twinkled with satisfaction. He was old enough to desire the good wishes of this pretty girl, and old enough to read her embarrassment. He felt a good deal of satisfaction at the situation, but gravely answered:

"Well, I haven't any desire to leave my bones in the desert for the buzzards to clean, and I'll try to take good care of myself. Now, I'll leave you here and try to do something for the major. I advise you to keep quiet, even though the Apaches come prowling around, but if the worst really comes, to mount one of the horses and make for Tombstone as fast as possible."

"I'll do so," she cheerfully answered, "but I expect to see you safely back."

And so it was arranged. Nature had thrown up a quantity of rocks and bushes around her hiding-place, and he hoped she would be secure unless he was absent until after daybreak.

Their parting was delayed even after all was ready, but he went at last, and was soon gliding toward the shanty.

He had not gone far before he saw three or four Apaches in a group, and from that point he had to be constantly on the alert. Luckily, he combined courage with experience, and he went on with a satisfactory degree of success.

Escaping notice, he soon neared the shanty. All was quiet there, but the place was lighted, and it was clear the cowboys had beaten off their enemies, and were on the alert for further hostile moves.

Gaining a favorable position, he surveyed the field carefully and laid his plans.

Leaving his rifle in the thicket, he made sure his knife and revolvers were in place, and then dropped flat on his face and began crawling toward the shanty.

In due time, he reached the wall of the shanty. He had purposely chosen a side where there was no window, and as he knew all such places would be guarded, he prepared for a bold undertaking.

His previous knowledge of the shanty made him aware that it could be scaled, and to this end he directed his efforts.

Climbing steadily, he went on successfully until the roof of the building was reached. Then, drawing himself up, he sat astride the ridge-pole to regain his breath and listen.

No unusual sound was to be heard. There were cowboys inside and Apaches all about, but all were on their good behavior just then.

Bob's next move was full of danger; he must make an opening through the roof, and though this was easy enough in itself, it might lead to speedy discovery. He began operations without much delay.

Looking down he paused to listen. The lower and upper parts of the shanty were separated by a loose pole floor, and through this light ascended in little bars, but unless he was greatly mistaken there were no men above.

"I'll risk it!" he muttered, grimly; and then he lowered himself and carefully trusted his weight on the floor.

Cautiously enough he moved the poles a little and looked down. The scene was what he expected. The cowboys were there, weapons at hand, but with the exception of the guards, all were lounging on the floor and smoking.

Dandy Duke was as much at ease as any of them.

In the same old corner Major Bragg sat as Bob had before seen him, but something like a melancholy look was on his rugged face.

Duke arose and went to his side.

"I want ter make that offer over ag'in," he said. "Will you fight fur us an' take freedom as vour reward?"

The veteran sniffed contemptuously.

"Still sulky, eh?" added Duke, with a profane termination. "Durn your ole carcass, I'm a

good mind ter take measures ter make you cackle!"

"Don't you get the idea I can't talk, you young hound!" burst forth the major, "but when you talk about my being your ally, that sort of chaff won't catch me. So it's freedom for my fighting, is it? Bah! I've seen such creatures as you before, and I know just how far I can trust you. Your promise ain't worth a picayune. If I helped you and we beat off the rascally reds, you would then go back on your word and hold me all the same. Oh, I know you, and I'm not going to make a fool of myself. No, sir!"

Hardened as Dandy Duke was, he was plainly affected at seeing his word held in such complete, though just, contempt, and a red flush was visible through the tan on his cheek.

"Be mighty careful, old man!" he exclaimed. "Don't fly too high. Remember, you're in my way, an' don't tempt me to put you out o' it."

"If you do it, my ghost will haunt you!" shouted Bragg. "I'll bring misfortune to you, anyway."

Dandy Duke's hand dropped on his revolver and he looked at the major with eyes that were full of cruel threatening. Brimstone Bob was alarmed at the veteran's rashness, but the latter was too furious to take counsel of prudence.

"Oh! you black-faced cut-throat, don't you think I'm afraid of you!" he howled. "You can't scare anybody that has fought men in his day. Go to Graveyard Bastion and ask its bones if I was there."

The young ruffian laughed in a strained way and turned aside.

"Have your own way, you old idiot!" he muttered, sourly, and then picked up his pipe to smoke again.

But he had no sooner placed it in his mouth than it flew into a hundred pieces, while at the same moment the crack of a rifle brought every cowboy to his feet.

Then upon the air arose the well-known, terrible yells of the Apaches, and the guards at the windows became busy as the red tigers leaped forward in another mad charge, dashing at the entrance in a way which would have terrified men less brave than those who defended them.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISSING.

No one was more surprised by this attack than Brimstone Bob, but, like all people who live on the frontier, he had learned to take things as they come, and in a moment he was as cool as ever.

The decisive attack followed closely on the shooting away of Dandy Duke's pipe, and then every defender was busy.

Bob looked with longing eye at Major Bragg; the chance to interfere in his behalf seemed at hand, but to do this he must venture into the very jaws of Duke's tigers.

Lightly as a cat he dropped to the floor below and stood in the midst of his enemies.

It was a great risk, but he did not falter. Every one of the cowboys was busy in battling

against the Apaches, and though he knew they would quickly turn if they saw and recognized him, he hoped this would not occur.

He ran to the side of the major, who was too much surprised to say anything, and cut his bonds.

"Follow me at once!" breathed the youth. "Delay now will be fatal. Follow me!"

Bragg caught the idea and was wise enough to obey. He cast a glance at Dandy Duke which showed how his mind ran, but for once he was willing to keep out of a broil.

Bob ran into the rear room, but there the fight was raging as briskly as anywhere. Only one chance remained. A rude ladder led to the upper floor, and this they ascended as quickly as Bragg's wounded leg would admit.

"Now, then, major, you may take charge if you want to—"

"By Mars!" interrupted the veteran, "I don't. A man that can carry out the scheme you've just put in force is the kind I follow, not lead."

"But I want your advice. Let me help you to the roof. Here we go!"

Bob suited the action to the word, helped the veteran up and then followed himself. They sat safely on the ridge-pole, while the fight raged below.

"Now," resumed Bob, "the question arises, shall we stay here and run the risk of being as bad off as ever, or slide down and make a dash with the chance of getting our heads split open?"

"I say make the dash," promptly answered Bragg. "My wooden leg ain't so nimble as I could wish, but the blood of Graveyard Bastion is still here—what I didn't leave."

"Down we go, then!"

No more time was wasted. Bob slipped one of his revolvers into the major's hands and descended like a cat. We can't give Bragg that credit, but he passed down safely until nearly half-way. Bob was watching him when a chill and something else fell over him. A pair of strong arms were wound around him, and he saw his hopes of an uninterrupted escape seriously nipped in the bud.

A guttural exclamation proved his captor an Apache, but before he could try to twist away there was a clatter above and the major's heavy form came shooting down.

Neither of them saw it in time to stir, and in a moment more the veteran dropped squarely on the Indian's head, and all three went to the ground together.

Brimstone Bob was up almost as soon as down and prepared for hot work, but when Bragg struggled up the Apache lay still. Bob bent over him. He was off the trail forever; the major's weight had broken his neck.

Other savages were near them, but all were too much engaged to heed this little side-drama. Bob caught his employer's hand, drew him away, and the darkness soon hid them from view.

Not until they had gone several rods did they pause to look back at the shanty. The fight was still going on, but it lacked its old force, and Bob suspected the Apaches were doomed to suffer another defeat.

"Let that be as it may," he added, after stat-

ing his views, "we want to get out of this speedily. Karah is waiting for us—"

"Karah?"

"Yes."

"Have you rescued her?"

"Yes."

"By George! you're a trump, young man. If ever we get out of this I'll make the account square if it's necessary to elect you Governor of Arizona. Hang it, I forgot that this one-horse place was a Territory, but I'll—"

"I don't doubt it in the least, major, but let us go on. Karah will be anxiously awaiting us."

It was a good idea and they went as fast as the major's wooden leg would allow. No Apaches were seen on the way and they neared the place where the girl had been left without adventure.

Reaching the refuge itself Bob paused and spoke her name.

"Karah!"

There was no answer.

"Karah!"

He spoke again, but nothing was to be heard but the faintly rustling leaves. Struck by a sudden fear he pushed his way through the thicket and looked about. The girl was not visible. Next he looked for the wagon. That, too, was not to be seen.

With fast-increasing uneasiness, in which Bragg began to join, he again called her name, and when there was no answer, began a more systematic search. He came back to the major at the end of a few moments.

"She is gone!"

"Gone where?"

"That I don't know. I left all as I have told you, but now Karah is missing, and so are my four horses and the wagon. I told her, in case of danger, to take one horse and make her escape, but I can't believe she has taken the four and the stage. Consequently, I believe she is captured by the Apaches."

"It is the infernal, villainous, diabolical luck of this ruffianly country!" fumed the veteran. "If I had an enemy I hated so much I didn't want him to die, I'd put him here and make him live."

Bob did not hear these words; all his thoughts were on the matter of Karah's disappearance. There was a pain in his heart which told how much he had become interested in her, and he felt a degree of demoralization new to him.

Where was Karah?

"We must have a light, major," he suddenly declared. "It's dangerous, but we may discover something. We must find which way the stage went."

A dry knot and matches soon gave the desired light, but no great discovery resulted from it. The stage had left the place in a due south direction with all the horses attached, and its pace had been rapid, the horses having been at once started into a gallop. From this Bob argued that Karah had fled from some danger, but it was not sure. Why had she taken the entire team along?

"I believe some other parties took the team," Bragg finally decided, "and I'll bet Karah is still in the woods. She may even have heard our voices, but mistaken them for those of enemies,"

"I give her credit for more shrewdness than that," Bob promptly remarked. "She is a girl of remarkable ability, and if she heard any one calling her she would wait to find out who it was before she put her fingers in her ears in feminine fashion. She isn't near here."

Bragg yielded to this argument; then stormed awhile at the "luck" and called himself a fool for venturing on the Tombstone trail, but finally came down to business and threw himself wholly on his young friend's judgment.

"What are we to do?" he helplessly asked.

Bob meditated.

"I can see but one way," he finally said. "Of course we can't consider any plan which does not include a prompt move in Karah's behalf. We believe she went in the stage, so we must follow the stage. How? Not on foot, certainly. We must help ourselves to the horses of our enemies. Now follows another point. If we take but two, they will have the means of following us. What follows?"

"Kill those we don't need."

"Perhaps your plan would be the wisest, but in this country we hate to kill a horse. No; we won't do so in this case, but we'll take every hoof we can fine with us."

Bragg voted the plan a good one, and they delayed no longer. Taking their way toward where Bob had last seen the cowboys' horses, they found the animals still there, and their hopes became strong.

Desultory firing was still going on near the shanty, telling that the Apaches, beaten off again, had settled down to a siege, and it looked as though they would get the animals clear unmolested.

They began operations at once. None of the horses were tied, but lariats were found hanging from a limb, and these were pressed into service. In this work Bob had to take the lead as usual, but he was equal to the demands of the occasion, and the work went on as rapidly as could be expected.

In due time the animals were fastened together in a way Bragg couldn't understand, but which he approved of, and then Bob bade him mount and take his half in tow.

The retreat from the vicinity began in good order, and all went well until the edge of the wood was reached. There Bob paused to search for the wagon-trail, leaving his horses with the major.

He did not find the trail at once, and time passed until Bragg became uneasy. Once he heard a sort of muffled cry from where his young friend had gone, and answered it, but utter silence followed.

The pause had grown ominous, when he saw a figure appear in the darkness and stride toward him.

"Well, I'm glad you've come," he said, with a sigh of relief. "I had begun to think—"

He paused, with his mouth and eyes wide open, for in the stalwart form before him he recognized not Bob but an Apache warrior.

The latter laid his hand on one of the horses, but the act aroused the major to desperation. Not doubting but that Bob had been captured and scalped, he resolved to part from such dangerous company.

With a celerity born of his military experience, he drew his revolver and fired, and as the Indian fell to the ground, followed it up with a yell which put all the horses in motion at once.

Away in the darkness they sped, taking a pace to suit themselves, and making it a telling one, while the major soon found that he was only a passenger.

At first he enjoyed the rapid going, and regarded it as a triumph on his part; but when he realized that he was leaving Bob behind, he looked around, and, seeing no pursuer, tried to stop his cavalcade.

He might as well have tried to bridle a blizzard.

The horses were thoroughly alarmed, and though they kept together well enough to make the couplings hold, they cared not a fig for Bragg's feeble strength. On they went, regardless of everything.

Bragg began to feel like an unbung murderer. The idea of deserting his young friend was obnoxious to a man who had fought at Graveyard Bastion, and he resolved to turn back.

He cast away the ropes by which he was leading the animals, but this did not help matters. He was in their very midst, completely surrounded, and as they were tied together, he could not fall out of line. He must go where they went.

"Great Pompey!" he groaned, as he hung fast to his horse in terror, "I'm in for it again. I'm a Mazeppa this time with a vengeance, and I shall be trampled under their hoofs. I've read of such things, and now I see it. Oh! tearing wild-cats! why didn't I keep off the Tombstone road?"

But his regrets came too late; he was on the road with a full head of steam on, and hemmed in by the uncontrollable horses, he was hurried away to an unknown fate.

CHAPTER XIV.

KARAH'S ADVENTURES.

AFTER Karah was left alone, she proceeded to obey Bob's orders to the letter. This was simple enough at first, for it consisted in keeping still as long as she was unmolested.

Nothing alarming occurred for some time after Bob went away. During this time she nestled in the cover of a ledge and awaited the result. She felt a little lonely, and she might possibly have been afraid had it not been for the Horse Quartette. These noble animals were near at hand, and as she shared the admiration nearly all people give the noblest of the brute race, she was not afraid while they were near.

She had a good deal to think about, in reviewing what had occurred since she was stolen from Tombstone, and the gallant young man who had come to her aid naturally played an important part in her thoughts. She admitted, to herself, that she had never seen any one who pleased her so much on short acquaintance as he, and she began to wonder if she would lose sight of him forever when these adventures were over or not.

Crack!

It was the snapping of a dry twig and at a

point which proved it to have been made by other means than the feet of Bob's horses.

Karah held her breath and looked and listened. Then she distinctly heard a stealthy moving among the bushes, and it almost seemed that a subdued breathing reached her ears.

She waited with a fast-beating heart. Nearer came the sounds, and she could no longer doubt. Some prowler was in the vicinity. Nearer still, and she made out the outlines of an Apache warrior, who looked grim and terrible.

Like one fascinated, she watched while the red buck peered inside the wagon, and then came nearer. He found the horses, and grunted his satisfaction at having come upon such choice horse-flesh.

All this while Karah was hoping she would escape detection, and like a frightened fawn she hovered under the shelter of the ledge; but without a premonitory sign he suddenly leaped forward and seized her arm.

Poor Karah! she had been overcome by the cunning of the serpent, and in the grasp fastened on her she struggled in vain.

He drew her out of her covert, and seemed to survey her as critically as though it had been broad daylight. On her own part, his eyes seemed to burn her, and she shivered painfully.

"Ugh!" he finally said, with a species of English, "who white squaw, an' what de thunder she do here?"

"Oh! don't hurt me!" cried Karah. "I won't do you harm!"

The idea seemed to please the Apache, for he uttered a guttural sound not unlike a chuckle. But he did not reply directly to what she had said.

"Where men?" he asked.

The question did a good deal toward restoring the girl's coolness.

"Two of them went away a moment ago, but the others ought to be here now," she answered, experimentally.

"Mebbe they come back; me scalp!" declared the Indian.

"You can speak to them about that," Karah replied, trying to appear at her ease.

"Squaw lie; no so many men here. How many, den? Mebbe you tell."

He ran his fingers through her hair suggestively; but though a good deal frightened, she did not waver.

"There are twenty if there's one," she persisted.

The Apache began to be uneasy. He had no desire to face so many foes, while on the other hand he did not want to lose either the girl or the horses. He meditated for a moment, and resolved to run some risk rather than lose them.

"You stan' here; nebber run step else me kill—cut throat, scalp, burn! Unnerstan'?"

"Yes, yes!" gasped Karah.

"Wal, you stan still like tree, else look out!"

With this warning the red-man proceeded to carry out the plan which he had formed, which was to put the four horses on the stage, and drive away in triumph. Now, this feat would have been far beyond the skill of many red-men, as well as white, but this particular buck had

once been a hanger-on at a certain officer's quarters, where he had learned to harness, to drink, play cards, and other manly arts.

He began to harness the team, occasionally pausing to look at Karah and bid her stand still as before directed.

She did stand still, but her brave little brain was busy, and she was preparing an act in the drama not put down by Mr. Lo on the programme.

He accomplished his work in due time, and the Horse Quartette stood in place around the pole; nothing remained to be done except for the driver to mount the box and move away.

Karah had been watching her chance, and as the Apache paused and looked toward the shanty, from which point suddenly arose fresh sounds of strife, she moved.

With all her force she pushed the warrior forward, moving so quickly that he had no time to evade her rush, and as he went crashing down the ascent, she sprung for the stage. In a moment she was on the box and the reins in her hands.

The Quartette had been a little excited by the crashing in the bushes, and when her voice rung out in a command to go they were ready.

There was a forward movement, a straightening of straps and traces, and then away went the team, with Karah in the driver's seat, and the reins in her pretty hands.

On they went, and as Karah saw their admirable work she soon abandoned all thoughts of guiding them and merely clung to the reins as through habit; on, until there was a sudden break of trees and she rolled from the green sward of the oasis upon the sand of the desert.

She went a hundred yards at full speed and then began to think of the future. Her unpremeditated flight had taken her away from Bob and the major, and she knew not what to do. Her first thought was to keep on toward Tombstone and make the trip as soon as possible, but as she recollected that she had her young rescuer's team she abandoned the idea.

Reining in the blacks a little she looked behind her. There she saw something of interest. Barely visible in the dim light a single figure—that of a man—was speeding along at a good pace and evidently trying to overtake her.

Believing that it was Brimstone Bob, she tightened the reins on the ever-obedient blacks, and they came down to a slow trot; a pace very much to their liking, as the wheels were cutting deep in the sand.

The runner then gained rapidly and came near. Karah, however, had her doubts. If it was Bob, would he not be likely to speak and reassure her? She looked as keenly as possible and then wheeled and spoke sharply to the Quartette.

She had recognized, not Bob, but an Apache warrior.

Her cry was not thrown away. The noble horses heard and knew its meaning, and with one accord they leaped forward, and the sand flew high in air from both their feet and the wheels.

The slackening of speed had been a great misfortune, however. Strong as they were, they could not at once resume their old speed, when the wagon was so bound down by the sand.

And the Apache shot forward like an arrow, decreasing the lead at every foot.

Karah was seized with consternation. Again she spoke to the blacks, and the wheels began to revolve at a tremendous rate—but too late.

Straight forward came the pursuer, and the girl's heart sunk as he laid one hand on the rear of the stage and mounted like a cat. The race was his, and the fair fugitive had a most dangerous passenger.

She looked back and saw his gleaming eyes almost at her shoulder, and she almost dropped from the box with fear.

CHAPTER XV.

ROUGH PLACES ON THE TRAIL.

WE left Brimstone Bob searching for the wagon-trail, after he had prepared the confiscated horse for the flight, and left them in charge of Major Bragg.

The young man had no idea as to the direction in which the stage had gone, except that gained from the direction it had at first taken. Judging by that, it must have emerged from the wood near the point where he then was, and he began a systematic search.

He had gone nearly a hundred yards when he found the desired sign. It was not hard to discover the wheel-tracks in the sand; one brief examination was enough for that, and he only paused to discover, by the length of the horses' stride, at what pace they were going.

As he bent over, he recognized the touch of a lasso, and raised his hands to cast it off, uttering a muffled cry as he did, so as to warn the major, but he was in the clutches of those who would let no chance pass.

He was drawn backward rapidly for several yards, and then several men pounced upon him, and he saw Apaches all around. He did not waver, even then, and succeeded in drawing his revolver, but it was knocked from his hand, and the force of numbers not only held him fast, but prevented further outcry.

With a celerity the inhabitant of civilized places can scarcely comprehend, bonds were applied to the prisoner's arms, and he was thoroughly helpless.

The majority of his captors drew to one side, and held a brief consultation. Then Bob was marched back into the wood, and in the direction of the cowboys' cabin.

He was taken near Dandy Duke's cabin. Fighting was no longer going on. The Apaches had twice been repulsed by the little garrison, who were brave if not worthy, and though they hovered near, they did not care to try a third assault.

Bob was given in charge of two warriors, and left to his thoughts. He had food enough for meditation. The disappearance of Karah, the whereabouts of Bragg and the intentions of the Indians were of interest.

Half an hour passed.

The surprises of the night were not past, however, and the fresh one came with the suddenness characteristic of the others. The Apaches were lounging about in a listless way when a chorus of wild yells burst upon their ears; dark forms shot into view from every quarter, and

with a cracking of rifles several of the warriors went down.

Bob was not at a loss to understand it. The cowboys, probably afraid that they would be left homeless in the desert, had carried the war into the enemy's camp and done it in a dashing manner not likely to fail.

In this emergency, only one of the savages remembered Bob, but he sprung forward to end the youth's career then and there. The latter saw a knife gleaming in his hand and wisely turned to flee, but the stroke could not be avoided.

Down came the weapon, causing a smarting sensation along Bob's back, but it was well for him the red-man struck. His hands fell apart and he knew the stroke had severed the cords, while it barely scratched the flesh.

It was the warrior's last blow, for even as Bob realized his good luck the fellow went down, killed by a chance shot.

Bob was in the midst of the fray, and as his own life was in peril, and he could not extricate himself just then, he caught up a fallen rifle and prepared for defense.

He was not called upon to strike a blow. The affray was soon over. The cowboys, hard fighters at all times, had made a tremendous effort and the Apaches were fleeing in all directions.

"Foller!" cried the voice of Dandy Duke. "We ain't going to let them chaps steal our hosses. Foller, sharp. Here, Jones, keep close to me!"

The last order particularly interested Bob, for it was he who had been addressed. He knew he had been mistaken for one of the band, but it made no difference and he quickly laid his plans.

"Kill ev'ry blamed varmint you kin!" ordered Dandy Duke, as they ran. "They've got ole Bragg an' ther gal an' they sha'n't take 'em away; not ef I know myself."

Bob had his own opinion as to this statement, but he made no words.

They soon found they were getting the best of the Apaches in the race, and unless they reached their horses soon it would again be hand to hand and a poor chance for the red bucks.

The crisis soon arrived. The horses were reached, but the Indians had no time to mount and escape. Some tried it and found a double weight in their place. The cowboys yelled and fought like veritable demons. They dragged men from their horses and butchered them—when they could.

Brimstone Bob knew the time had come for him to part from such dangerous company. Day was not far away, and when it arrived he could no longer pass for "Jones."

He was moving away when the battle surged hotly in his direction. Men pressed upon him and weapons gleamed in the air. He struck down an Apache, and then fell himself, with a dim idea that a mountain had fallen upon him, and lost consciousness.

When he opened his eyes he first saw that it was daylight. Next, trees became visible; then voices were audible. Men bent over him.

"Here's one that's alive," said a voice, "but who ther dickens is he?"

There was a pause; then a hearty, triumphant laugh.

"By thunder, it's Brimstone Bob!"

The youth was turned upon his back and saw the cowboys, blood-stained and bandaged, around him. Nearest, stood Dandy Duke, still laughing loudly.

"Wal I'll be shot!" he continued, "if I expected this. I say, Bob, how long since you j'ined ther Apaches?"

The man addressed raised himself on his elbow with outward calmness.

"I don't train in that company," he answered. "I've been a prisoner of the red dogs, but I fought for you to-night, as I'll trouble you to recollect."

"That's a lie!"

"It's the truth. You mistook me for some one named Jones, and we chased the Apaches side by side."

"Mebbe you're right," admitted Duke, slowly. "Boyees, look fur Jones. Young feller, whar's ther major?"

For an instant Bob did not know what to say. Duke was talking without much show of hostility, but he knew his nature by that time, and if he was aware that he had rescued Karah—and there seemed no room for him to be ignorant of the fact—he was in a close place.

Yet he resolved to carry a bold hand and act as the end made justifiable. He therefore denied all knowledge of Bragg, and claimed to have been captured on the desert to the north and held until the fight.

Duke made no more talk then, but ordered a search of the wood. This, while not thorough enough to discover the trail of the stage, did make certain the fact that while the cowboys had secured the Apache horses, they had lost their own.

The way the rough fellows raved when this became certain, would have shocked many a man who claimed to be wicked himself. There was an instant call for a pursuit, and Dandy Duke was by no means reluctant.

Old Bet, from some reason or other, had told him Karah had been taken away by an Apache, so he argued that she and the horses had gone away in charge of a very few bucks, whom it would be easy to vanquish when found.

The pursuit was accordingly begun.

Bob began to be uneasy. He knew Bragg and his horsemanship well enough to feel positive he could not long keep out of the way of these rough riders, and though Bob was to go along he would be of no use.

The future did not look promising.

Duke and his men started off as fast as the sandy soil would allow, and the wood was soon left behind. A long ride was expected, but as a timber belt a mile to the south shut out their view in that direction, they had no means of foreseeing the end.

It came quickly. They had not quite reached the timber, when from its cover burst what at first seemed to be a troop of wild horses.

Bob, however, quickly recognized them, for he saw that they were tied together and that the form of a single rider arose in their midst. It was Major Bragg and the stampedeers.

The cowboys were not much behind, and a

cheer arose as they saw their horses once more in their grasp, as it were. They spread out like a fan, preparing to envelop them, and there was no doubt as to the result.

Bob was bitterly disappointed at seeing the major again in trouble, but even then he could not help smiling at the ridiculous figure cut by the hero of Graveyard Bastion.

He kept his seat because he could not do otherwise, but no creation of a humorist's pencil could equal the look of utter misery and demoralization on his face. His hair, unfettered by his hat, which was long since lost, floated in the wind, and he used his hands to raise himself a little from the, to him, terrible backbone of the horse.

So unhappy was his position that Bob even thought he watched the movements of the cowboys with a hope that their plans would succeed.

CHAPTER XVI.

CANDIDATES FOR MARTYRDOM.

DANDY DUKE and his men made short work of the task in hand. The horses which had been "fiery, untamed steeds" to the major were as nothing to them in their stampeding mood, and in a short time they were secured and subdued.

Bragg escaped by scrambling over his steed's head, and Duke burst into a loud laugh as he saw that he was barely able to stand.

"I say, ole rooster, you need some ile on your j'ints," he coarsely observed.

Pain gave way to wrath with the belligerent major.

"You impertinent young hound!" he roared. "I may be a little stiff in my knees, but I'm able to wring your neck yet. Take your villainous horses; I've seen enough of 'em!"

Long and loud laughed the cowboys, but Bob managed to get the major's attention, and signaled to him to be careful what he said. The hint was not thrown away, and when Duke asked regarding Karah, her uncle declared he had not seen her since they were together in the shanty.

"Wal, we'll go back to ther woods, an' look right inter this matter," said Duke. "I'll sift it out of it takes a year."

Bob remained silent, but he wondered that the wagon-trail had not already been seen. With his knowledge of the direction in which the Quartette had gone, he had already been able to discern the track made by them. He kept his eyes to himself, however, and the return was begun.

The prisoners were allowed to ride beside each other.

"Have you had a hard time, major?" Bob asked.

"Hard! No, sir; it has been simply heathenish. The rack, wheel, and thumb-screw of the Dark Ages fades into nothing beside it. Those villainous horses went mad, sir—clean mad. You might as well have tried to govern a steam-engine with a piece of twine. The infernal brutes whisked me around just as they saw fit, and the backbone of the one I rode was worse than a concaved razor."

"He looks plump."

"Plump! You could cut beef-steak with his backbone—at least, I'm cut in two."

"Pork cuts easier than beef," interpolated Duke, who was still laughing.

"Takes a hog to find it out," retorted Bragg. "Hang the horse, and hang this whole villainous country. I was a fool to ever come into it. When I see the man who warned me not to go to Tombstone, I'll agree to furnish him with a handsome headstone when he dies."

"Easy, old chatterbox; you needn't hev no spite ag'inst Tombstone, for you never'll get there; an' as for the grave-stone, better keep it for yourself. You'll need it."

"I know them that'll get a rope," Bragg asserted.

Quarreling thus, Duke and the major went on with the others to the wood. The prisoners were placed in a shanty under guard, and the search for Karah began. Bragg tried to bribe their guards and failed. Even Old Bet turned a deaf ear toward them, and showed unusual spite toward Bob. She had not forgotten what part he took in the rescue of Karah.

It was half an hour later when Duke returned, accompanied by his men. One look at his face was enough to show that all that was ugly in his nature had in some way been aroused.

He fixed his gaze on Bob, and, prefacing the remark by an epithet too coarse for record, shook his fist madly, and hissed:

"You young dog! you b'en lyin' ter me!"

"What about?"

Bob realized his danger, but he spoke coolly.

"About ther gal, you calf-checked villain! You tried ter pull ther wool over my eyes, but I've got ye down fine. Your ramshackle old wagon has b'en in ther wood, an' Karah went away in it."

"Is that so?"

"You know it is, you—"

"I know nothing of the kind," Bob coolly interrupted. "I am willing to admit that my stage has been here, and that Karah was last night left near it by me. I returned and found her gone, also wagon and horses, and everything else. Why they went, where they went, or where they now are, I haven't the remotest idea."

His straightforward manner impressed Dandy Duke and made him believe, but it did not serve to abate his wrath.

"How did you come by ther gal?" he demanded.

"Called here for her," Bob nonchalantly replied.

Duke turned his eyes threateningly on Old Bet.

"You've lied, too!" he snarled.

The woman began to make voluble excuses, but he cut her short and called for a plain statement of the facts. She gave them, and he began to see more clearly; but as he realized what Bob had done, he turned to him in a manner decidedly ominous.

"You're too smart, you bel!" he exclaimed.

"I ain't see'd a chap fur some time who got in my way so much as you have. Now, I reckon you're goin' to get out on't. I've borne it as long as I will!"

The young ruffian paused and looked at his rival in a way which would have terrified many an older man; but Bob's smooth cheeks kept their color.

Bragg was more alarmed than he would have been if his own life had been in danger, and he began a plea which both youths interrupted.

"Save your breath, major," said Bob, in an undertone. "You can't help me, and he shall not see me waver."

Duke knew the good of striking while the iron was hot, and he promptly ordered every one out-of-doors.

By his order a rope was brought and noosed, after which one end was thrown over a strong branch.

"Give this dog his collar," Dandy Duke then said, trying to be facetious; and Bob's neck was duly encircled.

"Ef ther major feels like sheddin' tears, I'll say ter him that you ain't lost, but gone afore. He'll take his turn right after you. I'll hang you both higher than Haman. Now, then, is all ready?"

"Everything an' everybody except ther wictims," remarked one of the men at the rope.

"They can prepare t'other side ther range. Run this critter up!"

Duke spoke triumphantly, and with a smile on his face, and at the word the men pulled sharply at the rope and Brimstone Bob swung in mid-air!

The progress of our story now requires us to return for a time to Karah, whom we left in an unpleasant position.

The Apache, having gained the body of the stage, was crawling forward toward the girl, who was too much terrified just then to recollect that she had a revolver in her belt. Forward came the red buck, and then one of his hands was laid on her shrinking shoulder.

"White squaw mighty heap fine driver!"

She recognized the voice; he was the same man who had intruded upon the refuge in which Bob left her; and she sincerely regretted that she had not paused then to put him forever past the power of mischief.

"Reckon dis way bes'."

Without mounting to the box the buck ran an arm along each side of her and, taking the reins in front of her own hands, swung the team around in a graceful curve.

"Now, we go back," he said, in the same placid way.

A rebellious mood came over the girl and she tried to think of a way out of her trouble. Her revolver was partially concealed by the folds of her dress and had thus far escaped his notice, but it was no time to use it. Such an attempt would merely result in her being disarmed. She thought of leaping from the box, but the idea, wild under any circumstances, was impracticable while his arms were about her.

He brought the horses down to a walk, gravely remarking:

"Mighty few times me go to ride wid pooty gal dis way. We go slow; hab better time."

"Get out, you red villain!" cried Karah, with

a little scream at the idea. "I wouldn't look at you!"

"Me like look at you; do Leaping Jaguar's eyes good. Pooty gal; me like her!"

He raised one hand and caressed her hair, whereat she screamed several times in loud succession, but it only served to make the Apache laugh. For the time being he was a good-natured vagabond, but the ugliness of his nature had once been shown and would again appear.

Seeming to be satisfied with his attempt at love-making, he took a firmer hold on the reins and urged the horses a little.

Karah was driven to desperation. She was being returned to captivity, and that means a good deal where man or woman falls among the Apaches. She resolved to risk all in an attempt at gaining her freedom.

As she was about loosening her revolver she noticed that the wood was no longer visible in front.

"We are not going to the camp!" she half-unconsciously exclaimed.

"Reckon not, much. Why go dere? Go, have to divide wagon, hosses, gal; stay, keep dem all. Hab squaw of own; sell t'other things."

Again did Karah lose her self-possession. Horrified at the idea she struck the Indian full in the face and then tried to leap from the box; but he easily frustrated her and then closed his brawny hand around her neck and shook her in a most brutal way.

"Bes' learn right away," he unfeelingly said. "Get dat ebery day when take you for squaw. You sit still now, else me choke ag'in."

Karah sat gasping for breath and found it no easy matter to recover it. His grip had been almost crushing and her delicate throat seemed on fire. She recovered gradually, and with the gain began to feel the resolution for which border heroines are noted. With life and honor at stake she would be foolish to hesitate longer.

Carefully she drew the revolver from her dress. It was ready for use—all except cocking. She wondered how she could do this and then use it before the Apache could stop her, but it must be tried.

With one motion she pulled back the hammer and raised the weapon to a level with the broad breast behind her, and almost at the same instant she pulled the trigger.

There was a flash, a report, a heavy fall, and then no one was near her on the box. The horses, freshly started, were going like the wind and she dared not look around at the dark object in the bottom of the stage.

How long she rode in this way she never knew. She was like one in a nightmare, for her young nature was not hardened to such scenes.

It was not until she suddenly recollected that she was going wholly at random that she aroused. Then, a little thought convinced her that she must conquer all repugnance and proceed systematically. She brought the Quartetto down to a walk, laid aside the reins and proceeded to get rid of her cargo.

Examination showed that the Apache bled freely, but it also showed one thing which pleased her a good deal. He was not dead nor likely to die. The bullet had ranged along his skull, stunning him, but doing no serious injury.

He was even then giving signs of returning consciousness, and it was well she had moved when she did.

She dropped the huge form out of the wagon and felt much easier as she receded from it.

All her attention then became directed to trying to make out her exact situation, but the attempt was a failure. Without a known star to guide her she did not know one point of the compass from another.

Still, it would not do to hesitate; she felt a feverish anxiety to get away from the place which had given her so much trouble, and she let the black horses go on at their easy walk.

The situation had not changed when night fell back before the advance of day, but when the sun arose she had the means of shaping her course and did not neglect it.

She had not gone far, however, before she halted the Quartette and sat gazing doubtfully ahead.

CHAPTER XVII.

DANDY DUKE'S HOUR OF TRIUMPH.

KARAH had been brought to a halt by the sight of a wood which arose before her in a prominent and suggestive form. There was nothing familiar about it, but she remembered that the lair of the cowboys was in just such a wood, and for a moment she was afraid it was the same.

The next moment she laughed at her fears.

"Nonsense! I have driven not less than ten miles since I started, and it isn't very likely I am at the same place. I am well on my road to Tombstone, and if it wasn't for Uncle Bragg and that young man I should feel perfectly safe. This wood is directly in my path and I see no reason for avoiding it."

She entered the wood and drove at a gentle trot, taking advantage of the greensward.

Half the wood had been passed when she suddenly pulled on the reins; a signal which the Quartette promptly obeyed, and yet a weak, irresolute effort in keeping with the look of horror which overspread her face.

A terrible scene had been presented to her gaze.

She saw a group of men—the well-known cowboys—and in their midst an elevated human form which dangled from the end of a rope.

Before she had time to discover more, a hoarse, triumphant laugh arose from the group and Dandy Duke's well-known voice arose.

"Lower ther prisoner! Another chicken has come home to roost and we'll cook ther hull lot at a b'ilin'. Down with him!"

The last order was superfluous; already the half-hanged man had been lowered and Brimstone Bob stood gasping from the effects of a choking which had done him no lasting harm and, certainly, no good whatever.

The coming of Karah, unfortunate as it might prove for her, had temporarily saved his life.

Duke sprung forward and caught one of the horses by the rein, and as his men seconded his effort, looked at Karah with a mocking smile.

"So you've come back ter him that loves ye best, my little lady? That's as it should be, and

I'll see that you don't go away again. This is a joyful reunion. Down you come, my sweet Karah!"

Standing at the step of the wagon he put up his arms as confidently as though he was to receive a willing guest.

Karah could not reply. The brave spirit which had sustained her through so many dangers was for the time quelled. She saw Bob and the major in as great trouble as herself, and she had not a word to say. She sat staring blankly, her face white and quivering, and when Dandy Duke drew her down she lacked the strength to resist or protest.

He led her to the side of Bragg and Bob. The latter had almost recovered from his choking and fully comprehended the situation.

"You see how it is," observed Duke, triumphantly. "I've got ther winnin' cards in this game, beyond a doubt. Hyar you all are, like fishes on a string, an' you're all mine. Do you hear, my venerable tramp?"

He addressed the hero of Graveyard Bastion, who could no longer restrain his indignation.

"You diabolical dastard!" he roared, "don't you think this combination wavers. Don't you think it once! It's luck has given you that lead, not any brains of yours. Brains! You haven't enough of them to feed an angle-worm, and what you have are trash. Don't you talk to me, you villainous scoundrel; I won't bear it. No, sir!"

Dandy Duke was laughing loudly.

"Why, my babe in the wood, how innocent you are! What can you do? You're as helpless as a fly. I hold the game in my hands and I'm going to make ye smart. D'ye hear me?"

The major broke into another roar, but it was not so confident as before.

"As I said," pursued Dandy Duke, "I'm goin' ter do some fine business now. I've decided ter marry Karah, an' thar are two men I don't want at ther weddin' obsequies. Them is Bragg an' Brimstone. Result, B. and B. go off the scene."

He shifted his gaze to Bob and continued:

"Ef there hadn't b'en no interruption, I'd had you fixed before now, but as it is I am going ter do ther job up a leetle browner. Your Hoss Quartette, as you call 'em, has got back, an' I shall make them useful. You set a great store by 'em, an' call them ther best hoss-flesh in Arizona. For months they've been your constant companions. When you hev gone, they've gone; when you hev come, they've come. You've gi'n 'em good usage an' sech. Now, we'll see what they'll do for you. An' ole Bragg an' ther gal shall see, too!"

His voice and manner told of a fixed and villainous plan which only one of his nature could conceive, but not one of the prisoners lifted a voice to turn him from his purpose. They knew any such attempt would be useless, and it would please the young brute too well.

He went away to perfect his plan, and the captives, though still under guard, had a chance to talk.

"What's afoot?" Bragg uneasily asked.

"It's impossible to say," Bob calmly replied, "but I have a presentiment that Miles Bland

is now about to end this feud. He has the power and the will, as you well know."

"He's a villainous wretch!" rumed the major. "When they told me at Digger's Delight that the Ginger Trail bristled with danger, I laughed at them, but I blame my stubbornness now, my poor Bob. My money tempted you to take me through to Tombstone, and it is to end in ruin. For myself I care little, but you are in the prime of life, and it is terrible for you to be cut off."

"Never mind, major," said the youth cheerfully. "I don't want to die, of course, but regrets won't do us any good. As for your share, give it no thought. You gave me a job and I freely took it, just as I have taken many others like it. 'Tis my trade. If I die at it, why, that's luck. That's all."

Karah sobbed audibly.

"Poor child! she feels for you, too," Bragg muttered huskily.

"Oh! what shall we do, uncle?" cried the girl. "He has helped me—he has helped us both. We must save him; we must!"

Bob's own lips quivered for a moment. Such sympathy, from her, was very welcome, but it had a chastened element arising from what seemed his nearness to death.

"I think we all understand each other," he then said in a calm voice. "We have been together, and worked together with a common object, and good-will has been between us. If any should escape this peril and live to be happy, let him, or her, look back to this episode with kindly feelings for those who fall by the way."

"We had better all die together," moaned Karah.

Bob felt a keener pain as he suspected that it would be better for her to die then, but the return of Duke prevented further conversation.

"All is ready," he briskly said. "Mr. Brimstone Bob, we are now about ter give ye ther biggest kind o' a ride ye ever had. Mazeppa, John Gilpin and that crowd fades clean away afore it. You, ole Bragg, an' you, Karah, notice how B. Bob goes a-hummin' ter no-whar."

The entire party, prisoners and all, went to the edge of the woods and no more time was wasted. Brimstone Bob was bound hand and foot, and a gag fastened in his mouth, after which he was utterly helpless. Being unable to resist, he submitted to all without word.

The plan then began to assume form.

The stage, with the horses still attached, was drawn up at one side. Then Brimstone Bob was led forward and his enemies proceeded to bind him to the wheels on one side.

"We're a-goin' to make you of some use," Duke explained. "I have often wondered why a wagon didn't have a side-rod as well as the wheels of a locomotive. Wishin' to experiment in this line, I now make use o' Mr. Brimstone Bob fur that purpose. Put on ther human side-rod!"

The men had the idea, but it was no easy matter to bind the prisoner exactly right. He was lifted and laid against the two wheels, half-way from the hub to the fellow, and there bound in a systematic manner. Dandy Duke intended that he should be borne over the desert in a po-

sition at once painful and free from immediate danger; he did not want him to die at once, but to suffer until hunger or other means carried him off.

The binding was therefore a delicate and ingenious task. Had he been tied to the outer rim of the wheel, a few revolutions would have ended his career, but, placed as Dandy Duke had planned, he could ride for miles, like a veritable human side-rod, and still preserve the breath of life.

In order to keep him in place, spokes were used as the case demanded, and when it was done, Dandy Duke felt sure he would not slip toward either hub or fellow.

"There you be, my daisy!" he then said. "I respectfully ask your happy family ter take note of you."

Karah and the major were taking note of him, and the pallor of their faces showed how deeply they felt. Bob was bound with his face toward them, and though a smile of contempt seemed fixed there, they knew his case was desperate; they did not see how the wagon could whirl over the desert, as Dandy Duke intended, without placing Bob on a veritable rack.

The young villain left nothing undone; he even remembered that as Bob went over he would strike against the hub if bound tightly, and so arranged him, and so covered the hub, that it could do no fatal injury.

All was ready except the means of making the team assume the rapid speed with which Dandy Duke desired them to set out, and he soon arranged that.

The Quartette had been standing quietly, champing their bits, but suddenly a fierce growl reached their ears—a sound they had heard before and of which they had a horror—and looking around they saw what appeared to be a grizzly bear running toward them.

Really, it was only a man in a dead grizzly's skin, but the loud and well-toned growls he uttered, coupled with his appearance, were too much for them.

With one accord they sprung forward to escape the seeming peril.

Then Bedlam seemed let loose. The cowboys yelled in concert, some of them struck the horses with whips and others threw clubs at them; and then away went the black horses, and Brimstone Bob was whirled to his fate.

There seemed to be no hope for him.

Karah and the major, looking after him, saw him whirled over and over at each turn of the wheels, and their hearts sunk within them.

Out on the desert went the black horses and the wagon; out on the desert went Brimstone Bob.

But how fared it with the young man?

It was a question he could not at once answer. Despite Dandy Duke's assertion that he would revolve easily, he had expected to be twisted and crushed almost at the first. Nothing of the kind occurred; Duke had done his work well. There was not the slightest tangling of the cords, and only that at each revolution he experienced a dull thud from the hub, he felt little pain at first.

Still, it remained a plain fact that his condi-

tion was precarious. He was alone on the desert without any means of stopping his team. Dandy Duke had thought of that when he gagged him; with his power of speech unimpaired he could have stopped his noble blacks with a word.

Over and over he went as the Quartette sped forward like the wind, a shower of sand being whirled over him by the fast-turning wheels. Dizziness, too, attacked him, but through it all he was looking toward the future.

He was not to die at once, that was certain. What, then, would happen? The horses would soon recover from their fright and moderate their speed. It would ultimately become a walk. What then? With no hand to guide them they would wander on an indefinite period. Their instinct would lead them to seek water. They would not be likely to suffer—but what of himself? By no means could he eat, and the wagon might stand by a spring, and he not gain a drop of water. If a river was crossed he might quench his thirst—or be drowned.

On the whole the outlook was horribly ominous; the young adventurer did not possess one chance out of a hundred. The hope that the Quartette would head for Tombstone was not to be considered. On that road lay the desert, while by keeping west they could find water and pasturage.

Brimstone Bob seemed doomed.

It was not many minutes before the horses slackened their speed, much to Bob's relief, and then he began a systematic effort to burst his bonds. Again and again he wrestled with each, or tried to eject his gag, but the cowboys had not blundered in a work peculiarly their own.

Bob was brave and hopeful, but there seemed so little chance for the last qualification that he paid no attention to it, trying rather to reconcile himself to the inevitable. He even wished that death might come speedily.

There was something peculiarly bitter about being borne to his death by his own team. Each one of the intelligent noble animals loved him and had always obeyed his slightest word. They would do so now as readily as ever, but he could not give the word. They were his uncounselling torturers.

Straight on they went, over the desert, and on to his fate went Brimstone Bob.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE END OF THE ROAD.

HAVING sent Brimstone Bob on his journey, Duke marched his force and the prisoners back to the shanty. Karah was weeping, and the major stormed in his usual way, but this only pleased the young ruffian the more. Their mental pain was his enjoyment.

"You shall take your turn in good time, old man," he said to Bragg, as he placed them in the main room. "As I said before, I'm goin' ter marry my pretty Karah, an' I won't have you turnin' up like a ghost at ther banquet. You saw fit ter go on ther Ginger Trail, an' now you must take ther consequences."

"Go your length, you superfluous dastard," said Bragg, trying to shake his fist, but failing,

because the bonds held him fast. "When I ask mercy of you, just put it on record, will you?"

"I'll make you howl yet," Dandy Duke declared.

"Not if I know it. The survivors of Graveyard Bastion don't howl easy."

"One of them will stop howlin' mighty soon."

Dandy Duke arose, walked to the side of Karah, and put his arm around her waist. She gave a little scream and struggled to release herself, whereupon Bragg arose in spite of the two cowboys who held him, wild with indignation.

His hands were bound behind him, but a thrust of his wooden leg sent one of the ruffians to the floor.

Before the veteran could repeat the stroke, he was felled by a blow from a third enemy, and lay dazed and nearly stunned at their feet.

"Good for you, Drake," commented the cowboy leader. "That'll show ther old reprobate not ter kick up a fuss, but you've hit so hard that I opine ther critter won't get his wits back right away."

Such was found to be the case, and Dandy Duke was obliged to postpone further work for the time. He gave Karah in charge of Old Bet, swearing that the woman should die if she again allowed her to escape, and then he began to mature a plan for the last act in his drama.

Due meditation gave him what he believed was the best way. One of his men was dispatched to bring a certain minister of whom Dandy Duke knew, and knew to be thoroughly unscrupulous at that. When he arrived, Dandy Duke proposed to wed Karah, whether she said her part in the ceremony or not.

After that, a tree and a rope would send Bragg out of the way forever.

The major did not recover readily from the blow he had received. He lay for hours in the same dazed condition and the cowboys had nothing to do but idle away the time.

Night drew near and twilight fell over the wood. Dandy Duke posted a sentinel on each side of the shanty and, with his remaining men, prepared to pass the evening agreeably. Liquor was produced from the store-room and, with tobacco and cards, became the ruler of the hour.

Major Bragg had recovered his mind fully, but when he realized that proceedings were delayed on account of his supposed condition, he kept up the show and no one suspected the truth; it even began to be suspected that he had sustained a fracture of the skull, or something of the kind.

No one made an examination, and even then the bonds had been left on his hands. If he saw fit to die, the cowboys were willing.

The cowboys, deep in their whisky, cards and tobacco, and cursing like demons, shocked even the old soldier.

As he lay he worked at his bonds, trying to free his hands. What he would do if he succeeded was not clear, for the odds were strong against him, but his desire was natural.

Yet, all his twisting and trying amounted to nothing; he failed to free himself.

As the liquor worked on Dandy Duke his mood became more vicious and dangerous.

"What's ther use o' our hevin' this picnic alone when there's female company near? Who's in favor o' bringin' out ther gals?"

A general yell arose from the young ruffians. The proposal was just what each one of them desired, and the noise with which they greeted it settled Duke's mind. He called on two of his followers and they staggered into the next room.

Major Bragg groaned aloud, but he was not heeded. The thought of Karah, pretty Karah, in such company almost maddened him, and he wrestled furiously with his bonds.

Vain attempt!

Back came the trio with Karah and Old Bet in their grasp. The young girl was deathly pale and even Bet looked troubled.

"Three cheers fer ther women!" directed Duke, and the room rung with the responsive yell.

"Now begins ther unrivaled minstrel scene!" continued Duke. "First thing on ther bill is a dance by Signora Bet Fairytelli. Go it, Bet; shake ther light, fantastic toe!"

The woman saw wherein lay her safety, and forcing a good-humored smile to her face she began to dance. Never accomplished in that line, her weight now affected her so that she was about as graceful as a cow, and the young villains rivaled each other in unearthly shouting.

The uproar was at its height when a new sound broke in on the orgies; a clearer, shriller, more effective sound; and through every window came pouring Apache warriors, weapons in hand, until the cowboys were hopelessly outnumbered. And not for a moment delayed the red bucks, but with blood-curdling yells they sprung upon the momentarily-dismayed and hushed cowboys.

Major Bragg's brain reeled, but something soon occurred to clear it. A light, lithe form shot to his side, his bonds were severed, and he saw the face of Brimstone Bob.

"Up, and prepare to follow me!" breathed the youth.

Another moment and he was gone, but by the time Bragg was on his feet he was back again and holding Karah in his arms.

"The window!" he exclaimed.

The major forgot his wooden leg and went out with commendable agility. Bob pass Karah to him and then followed, leaving the cowboys and Apaches in a death-grapple.

Briefly bidding the elder man follow, Bob seized Karah's arm and they hastened away. A few paces they went and then the stage was seen with the Quartette attached. A single figure was near it, and seeming that of an Apache, but Bob looked to him as to a friend.

Before the major had time to think clearer, he was inside the stage, and, with Bob and Karah on the box, they were fleeing at the utmost speed of the Quartette.

The Apache figure, oddly enough, was following beside them on horseback.

"What does it mean?" Bragg blankly asked, as they emerged from the wood.

"It means that I didn't take a very long ride when Dandy Duke bound me to the wheel. I ran straight into the Apaches, who took me in. I thought at first it was a bad matter made

worse, but I've found out different. When the reds were preparing for this attack, yonder man," pointing to the horseman, "came to my side and released me. Once before in that very wood he saved my life by feigning to spear me, and making a false stroke. He was the unknown friend of whom I before told you."

"I am a white man," said the rider, speaking for himself. "I have been wild and wicked enough to become a renegade, but my conscience wasn't equal to it. I have done one good deed to-night by saving you, and I'll do another by clearing out and living an honest life after this."

"Come with me and I'll place you above want," the major declared.

"No. I begin an honest life as a poor man. When I am sure you are safe from pursuit, I shall say good-by forever."

By this time they had gone beyond all sounds from the shanty, but when the preponderance of Apache numbers was considered it was not hard to surmise how the fight would end, nor what would be the fate of Dandy Duke.

Our story is done in detail. Our friends reached Tombstone in safety, their unknown friend bidding them farewell half an hour before the place was reached. They never saw him again.

From that night, too, they never saw Dandy Duke. A report was brought in which told how a dozen white men had been butchered at a certain point by the marauding Apaches. That was the obituary of the man who had caused them so much trouble.

Major Bragg put all of Karah's property into ready money and took her to Austin, Texas. Bob accompanied them, for the major thought there was not another boy like him in the world.

The latest news from the three reports Bob, now called Robert Grover, to be the most promising young man in his section, and it says, too, that in a few days pretty Karah becomes his wife.

The major is delighted. He is getting a little old, but he is all bound up in his young friends. He sounds their praises on all possible occasions, and when he hears any stranger make admiring remarks concerning an outfit of four splendid black horses which is now and then seen on the street, he likes to tell of his ride to Tombstone behind Brimstone Bob's Horse Quartette and their many adventures on the road.

THE END.

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